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JANET.

A Novel.



Fawcett, Millicent Garrett

" — What will not woman, gentle woman, dare
When strong affection stirs her spirit up!"
Southery's Mados.

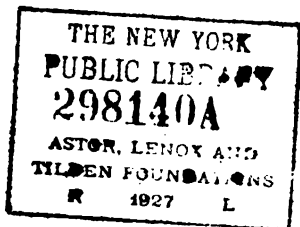
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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. NORBOROUGH	7
II. MRS. DONCASTER	18
III. JANET MAKES A FRIEND	35
IV. WHY MRS. DONCASTER WAS A MATCH-MAK- ING MAMMA	45
V. THE TENANTS OF NORBOROUGH HALL	65
VI. NORBOROUGH MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF THE ARISTOCRACY	81
VII. LADY ANN'S SCHEME	98
VIII. FRIENDSHIP AND SEA-BREEZES	118
IX. FORSYTH	139
X. WAITING FOR THE VERDICT	156
XI. LADY ANN ROUTS THE ENEMY WITH GREAT SLAUGHTER	181

CHAPTER	PAGE
XII. JANET'S HONEYMOON.	197
XIII. NORBOROUGH HALL AGAIN.	216
XIV. THE OLD HOME AND A NEW ONE	226
XV. NEW KNOWLEDGE AND NEW HAPPINESS	241
XVI. FRIENDS AGAIN.	256
XVII. FOREST WALKS.	262
XVIII. JANET'S TOWER.	270
XIX. LEAVING OAKHURST	281
XX. CHOOSING	297
XXI. THE END	319





JANET

CHAPTER I.

NORBOROUGH.

No stir of air was there,
Not so much life as on a summer's day
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass.

KEATS.



HERE are probably few English people who do not know many such villages as Norborough. Its distinctive features were its situation on the sea-coast, its mayor and corporation, and its charter dating from James I. ; it had also the distinction of having once returned two members to Parliament, and of having been one of the rottenest of the rotten boroughs disfranchised in 1832. Its non-distinctive features

were its long rambling street of nearly a mile from end to end, breaking out fitfully now and then into little dreary patches of common, ornamented with clothes'-lines and fishermen's nets; its two thousand inhabitants, of whom about ten families were prosperous, twenty on the border land between poverty and prosperity, and all the rest belonging to the adventurous and improvident seafaring population. The leaders of Norborough society consisted of one well-to-do merchant's family, the clergyman, two retired naval officers, the commander of the coastguard, and one doctor. There were from time to time other "distinguished residents," who made Norborough their summer quarters, but these were hardly considered real Norborians by the natives. There was no squire in the village. The house on the top of the hill a mile away from the sea, that ought to have been occupied by the squire, had been tenantless for many years. Norborough was not a lively place. The principal source of interest and excitement to its inhabitants was derived from watching the struggle for existence of the second doctor, and

reporting the scandalous doings of the lieutenant of the coastguard. For Norborough was graced by the presence of two medical men, who divided the practice of the neighborhood between them. Acting on the economic principle of the division of labor, each undertook a special class of practice, and confined himself thereto. Mr. Grey, the old-established Norborough doctor, attended all the patients who paid; the other doctor—there was a new one about every eighteen months—attended all the patients who did not pay. Mr. Grey was always most affable to the new-comer; he thought it an excellent thing for a young and inexperienced practitioner to have the opportunity of trying his 'prentice hand. This charitable expression of good feeling towards a man who might be regarded as a rival, was thought by Mr. Grey's paying patients to indicate great elevation of character; at the same time it precluded any idea they might otherwise have entertained of allowing the 'prentice hand any chance of operating on themselves. If it was ever suggested to Mr. Grey that the "Bob Sawyer" for the time being, and his wife and chil-

dren were on the verge of starvation, and that a living was not to be had by a second doctor in Norborough, he would elevate his eyebrows, and say, "Why, the club and the parish alone are worth 70*l.* a year to him." He was apparently oblivious of the fact, which he had reduced to a very simple sum in subtraction a score of years ago, that when the offices of club and parish doctor involve driving a circuit of twenty miles three times a week, the consequent necessity of keeping a gig, two horses, and a groom, materially reduces the pecuniary value of the appointments; bringing it down, in fact, on the most moderate calculation, to about 20*l.* a year less than nothing. The most awful rumours were whispered in Norborough about the "goings on" of the new doctor's family. It was known for a fact, for Hooky Ward's little boy had been in the yard when it was being cut up, that the Connells had eaten the horse that Mr. Connell used to drive—the one that fell down dead in the street, you know. When Mrs. Connell's fifth baby was born, Mrs. Sedgely declared that if ever a woman wanted the loan of the mother's linen-box,

it was Mrs. Connell; many a laborer's wife was better provided; she never in all her life had seen, &c., &c. To think that anybody calling herself a lady, &c. The Connells were succeeded by the Greenwoods, the Greenwoods by the Findons, and so on, in a rapid succession; each new comer affording, in his brief and unsuccessful struggle, material for gossip of a most ghastly description.

The lieutenant of the coastguard was another perennial source of interest at Norborough; not on account of his misery, but on account of his unparalleled depravity. He not only cheated at cards, and sat up all night, after taking his rounds, playing billiards and drinking brandy-and-water at the "Blue Lion." He not only got drunk if he was asked out to dinner, but, worst of all, he had once, in a moment of inebriation, called the rector "old hoss," and had been known to go out fishing on a Sunday. This latter delinquency was severely reproved by his superior officer; and the reprobate lieutenant was heard, in the coffee-room of the "Blue Lion," to give an accurate reproduction of Captain Macduff's sermon on the occasion, con-

cluding with the remark, "Pity I didn't remember to send the old boy half-a-dozen pairs of soles the first thing on Monday morning." Such an imputation on the sincerity of Captain Macduff's piety was disgraceful. Mrs. Sedgely agreed with Mrs. Grey that the Government ought to remove Lieutenant Smalley from the service.

Beside these topics of conversation, which may be described as supplying the tragic element in Norborough gossip, there were other kinds of gossip that may be described as genteel comedy and screaming farce. The particulars of Mrs. Connell's domestic economy and Lieutenant Smalley's misbehaviour were communicated in sepulchral whispers to Mr. Grey after the younger members of his family had gone to bed, by Mr. Sedgely. When the subject was more ghastly and horrible than usual, the two gentlemen generally retired to enjoy it in Mr. Grey's little dispensing room, where they were absolutely safe from female intrusion. This precaution, however, was not taken with any mean desire to exclude the women-folk from sharing the fruit of the Norborough tree of knowledge of good

and evil ; but it was resorted to simply in order that Mr. Sedgely should be entirely at his ease in giving all particulars of his narrative. The more horrible the revelation, the more certain was Mr. Grey to recount it all to Mrs. Grey directly their visitor had gone ; and Mrs. Grey could seldom resist the temptation of telling the tale to the elder Miss Grey, as the mother and daughter sat over their needlework on the following morning. Mrs. Sedgely generally brought her contribution of gossip first to the Greys. If a tale had the sanction of Mrs. Grey, Mrs. Sedgely always felt much greater confidence in repeating it ; so, for the sake of her own peace of mind, she generally brought her story up to Mrs. Grey to receive its credentials. For instance, about eleven o'clock in the morning, Mrs. Sedgely would come slowly into the warm dining-room where Mrs. Grey and her two daughters were sitting, give them each in silence a damp kiss, then sink into a chair, and say solemnly, " I suppose you have heard, dear Mrs. Grey ? " " Heard what, Miss Trotter ? " Mrs. Grey would say, in a snappish voice. Mrs. Sedgely had been,

previous to her marriage, governess in Mrs. Grey's family ; and when Mrs. Grey wished to impress Mrs. Sedgely with a sense of her own superiority, she generally called her late dependant by her maiden name. This always had the effect of afflicting Mrs. Sedgely with a kind of nervous imbecility which made her longer in coming to the point than usual.

"Perhaps it isn't true," she would say, with a melancholy smile. "They do say such things here. I am sure not more than half of them are true."

"What is it, Mrs. Sedgely ?" breaks in one of the young ladies.

"Well, dear, I may be wrong. I shouldn't like it repeated on my authority, but they *do say* that Mr. Hope, the new brush-maker, who married Miss Spence, has returned here with his bride in a third-class carriage."

If Mrs. Grey replied to this, "Nonsense, Miss Trotter, I was in Mrs. Spence's shop yesterday, and she told me that her daughter had not returned at all at present," Mrs. Sedgely would never regain sufficient-confidence in her tale to be able to repeat

it to her other friends. Whereas, if Mrs. Grey replied, "The Norborough tradesmen are mean enough for anything, Mrs. Sedgely," the good lady would go away with a light heart and repeat the story of this astonishing instance of stinginess half a dozen times a day for the next fortnight. At the end of which time the story had assumed the form that Mr. Hope was so mean that he had actually compelled his young wife to walk all the way from Gipping, the county town, to Norborough, a distance of twenty miles; that she had fainted on the doorstep of her new home, and that her life was now despaired of. In vain Mrs. Hope appeared at church, rosy and smiling, in her wedding bonnet and in a shawl of extraordinary splendour. Norborough insisted on shaking its head and saying, "Ah, poor thing! it's all very well to put a good face upon it; she does bear up wonderful! But we know very well what she's had to go through."

Such were the subjects of thrilling interest that from time to time agitated the calm of Norborough society. Of the general course of foreign and domestic politics the Norborians took no heed.

They knew that the Duke of Wellington was dead ; they had been aware of the Crimean war and of the Indian mutiny. Towards the end of 1870 some of the more active minds among them were beginning to seize the fact that Lord Palmerston had gone the way of all flesh ; but of politics in the ordinary sense they were entirely innocent. Mr. Grey voted yellow ; so did the rector ; Mr. Ralph, the corn merchant, voted blue. So blue and yellow were pretty evenly balanced in the little town, for Mr. Ralph's custom was worth as much as Mr. Grey's and the rector's put together. Mr. Ralph attended the London corn market on the first and third Monday in every month. He was therefore regarded by his neighbours as a prodigy of activity and business capacity. The other Norborians seldom "paid a visit to the great metropolis," as they called it. It required a Great Exhibition, or a National Thanksgiving, or a Duke of Wellington's Funeral to draw them thither. Hence there was curious stillness and stagnation in the little place. The extravagance of Miss Spence in the matter of Sunday bonnets excited more interest in Norbo-

rough than the Orissa famine ; the misdoings of kings, emperors, and prime ministers sank into insignificance in comparison with the dissipations of Lieutenant Smalley.

Such was Norborough, the home for the first twenty years of her life of the heroine of this tale, Janet Doncaster.





CHAPTER II.

MRS. DONCASTER.



MRS. DONCASTER had come to Norborough, a widow, when Janet was three months old. She was a reserved woman, one who did not make friends quickly. Her manner was cold and unsympathetic, and repelled friendship more quickly than the pensive beauty of her features, the sweetness of her voice, or the sterling integrity of her character attracted it. She never had the power of attaching those about her very strongly to herself. She was upright and habitually unselfish. She was, however, blind to the fact that her life was narrow and dull, and presented but few attractions to the eager, enthusiastic child that shared her solitude. There were two things that lifted Mrs. Doncaster's life

out of the grey commonplace in which so much of it was passed. The first, and by far the most important, was her deep religious fervour. The second was her love for Janet. Mrs. Doncaster's religion was not of a very attractive sort : it was after the straitest sect of the Puritans—evangelical ; but it gave her interests that transcended to her all earthly interests. Had it not been for her religion, her life would have been passed in the unbroken routine of domestic duties. She would have had no other interest more absorbing than that of making 350*l.* a year do the work of 400*l.* But her religion shot the dull fabric of her life with a golden thread. The Bible to her was a priceless treasure. It was read and re-read ; the various passages were compared, annotated, and scored like a scholar's Plato. The intensity of her love for Janet was based on her religious fervour. Janet was not merely her child ; she was a precious soul, graciously vouchsafed to the keeping of her earthly parent, to be brought up to the honour and glory of her heavenly Father. Janet's conversion was a possibility that tinged the whole of Mrs. Doncaster's life with

eager hopefulness. She would say to herself sometimes that she was certain that in His own time Janet would be brought into the fold of the one Shepherd. The child of so many prayers would never be allowed to become a castaway. At other times, when Janet's conversion seemed as far off as ever, her mother's despondency would deepen; she would appear for days with a white face and red eyes, because, perhaps, she had heard Janet singing "Auld Robin Gray" in the garden on Sunday morning. Janet would be all the while profoundly unconscious of the cause of her mother's distress. She was probably altogether unaware of having been guilty of singing a secular song on a sacred day. She would notice her mother's depression, and think that perhaps she had had a disagreeable letter from grandpapa, or perhaps she had heard Lieutenant Smalley swearing at his dogs; for bad words disagreed with Mrs. Doncaster worse than heavy pastry. The relations between the mother and child did not admit of Janet frankly asking her mother what was wrong; so Janet would be more than usually thoughtful and attentive to her

mother; Mrs. Doncaster would recognise these loving offices as some sign that Janet was not at present dead in her sins, and her despondency would gradually disappear until it was renewed by some equally innocent transgression.

Mrs. Doncaster's marriage had been a cause of a great rupture between herself and her parents. While yet a girl she had strongly disapproved what she considered the worldly and godless life of her family. She frequently felt herself bound to bear testimony to the faith that was in her by protesting against card-playing and frivolous conversation. Her example did not consequently make active Christianity popular in her immediate circle. She was a member of a wealthy family, and a liberal allowance was made to her, with the expectation that she would spend the greater part of it in dress, so that she might be an ornamental piece of the domestic furniture. She, however, never wore anything but a brown stuff gown, and devoted every shilling she could spare to Missionary Societies and Sunday Schools. Great was the chagrin of Mr. and Mrs. Finch, her father and mother,

when she appeared at an evening party dressed, as her brothers and sisters said, "like a charity girl, and looking as if she saw nothing nearer than the land of Canaan." When remonstrated with on the subject she would rejoin, that she wished for nothing more than to be excused from joining such assemblies, as she believed them to be one of the great instruments for evil used by the enemy of souls. More than this she dared not say to her parents, but she felt that if they were not satisfied with the obedience she had shown them in joining their worldly gaiety, but also demanded that she should wear "the very livery of Satan" (a phrase that she had heard in a sermon, and had applied specially to a white silk dress her mother had given her), the case was one that justified open rebellion. She was in this state of constant antagonism to all her family when she met at the Sunday School as a fellow-teacher, a young man with a religious enthusiasm equal to her own. Their friendship soon ripened into love, and Mary married him in defiance of the wishes of her parents. A chief part of their annoyance at the match lay in the fact that,

although Mr. Doncaster gave himself up entirely to work usually considered clerical, he was not in orders. If he had been a clergyman, they would have swallowed their disgust at his poverty. Old Mr. Finch would have bought him a small living, and talked pompously about "my son-in-law, the vicar of so-and-so;" and if he had thought it necessary to allude to the pecuniary circumstances of the young couple, it would have been to thank God that his children had enough of this world's goods to make them independent in their choice of a partner. But as it was, no words could express his mortification that his daughter (his eldest daughter too, what an example to her younger sisters!) should disgrace the family by marrying a "beggary missionary, a scripture-reader fellow." Mr. Finch gave a practical mark of his disapprobation of his daughter's conduct by making her no allowance, and the young couple, therefore, were extremely poor; but they were, notwithstanding, supremely happy, for their lives were spent in the joint pursuit of a common object. In two years, this happiness came to an end; Mr. Doncaster had been in con-

stant attendance on a small-pox patient, whom no one else would go near ; he caught the disease and died after a short illness. The first mark of sympathy which Mrs. Doncaster received from her family was a note from her father to say that he had heard of Mr. Doncaster's " demise," that he hoped his daughter now recognised that children who rebelled against their parents never prospered ; nevertheless, his paternal heart was ready to forgive, if it could not forget, her disobedience. He enclosed her a cheque for a hundred pounds, and said that he would allow her the annual sum of 300*l.*, from date, during her life. " I am thankful," he concluded, " that you have no children, and you will, therefore, never yourself experience the pain you have caused me."

Mrs. Doncaster was too much broken down by her loss to be pained by the tone of this letter. She was tasting " the very worst of fortune's might ;" all other griefs seemed trivial. She thanked her father for his allowance, and said she accepted it, not only for herself, but for her unborn child. After this, her mother came to see her, and some

superficial reconciliation took place ; but Mrs. Doncaster felt the presence of those who had been hostile to her husband to be wearisome and uncongenial ; she wished to be either with those who had never known him, or with those who would share her grief for him. She therefore did not encourage the visits of her relatives, and after a few weeks she went to the house of an elder sister of Mr. Doncaster, who lived in a distant county. Here she stayed till her child was born ; and it was by the advice of her sister-in-law that she settled at Norborough with her baby. There was at that time no railway to Norborough, living was cheap there, house-rent was low, and there were plenty of poor people among whom Mrs. Doncaster could continue her husband's work.

Thus it happened that Janet's youth was passed in the narrow Norborough society. Hers was not at all a merry childhood. In the first place Mrs. Doncaster had been very disappointed that her child was a daughter and not a son. She had set her heart upon having a son, and bringing him up to be a missionary. A girl could not be a mission-

ary, and was consequently not so interesting to Mrs. Doncaster as a boy would have been. Then, to her mother's anxious eyes, Janet, at the early age of three and a half, showed unmistakable signs of a worldly disposition. The giddy infant was highly delighted with new clothes, and the smarter they were the better she liked them. She learnt to sing nigger melodies that she heard sung in the streets much more quickly than she learnt to sing Dr. Watts's hymns. She drew no hard and fast line between Sunday stories and Monday stories ; she would ask first for Jack the Giantkiller, then for Daniel in the lions' den, in a manner that made her mother tremble. When she said her prayers at her mother's knee, Mrs. Doncaster, having impressed upon her that she was not to learn any form of prayer, but to ask of God from her heart whatever she most desired to have, she prayed for "a red cloak wiv velvet buttons, 'xackly like Amy Grey's. Vere is anover at ve shop." Then, when instructed not to ask for material, but for spiritual blessings, her interpretation of a spiritual blessing was that there might always be short sermons in church.

When she had scarlatina and Mrs. Doncaster had begged her to pray for her recovery, Janet, having been told that when she was beginning to get better her skin would peel off, and that when it was all off she would be quite well, joined her little hands in bed and said in a soft voice, "O God, peel me quick." Made desperate by the comical things, Janet asked for in her prayers, Mrs. Doncaster at length taught Janet to repeat a fixed form of prayer and thus excluded the possibility of inconvenient originality.

Mrs. Doncaster was so fearful of the influence of worldly companions on Janet, that she seldom allowed her to associate with the few children of her own age and position that Norborough contained. Janet would probably have become either an infant phenomenon of piety, or very sulky and morbid, if it had not been for the sea. She loved the sea like a playmate, especially when it was rough; she seemed to become part of it. She would stand shouting for mere joy among the foam, running after the waves as they retreated, rushing back again with a great breaker at her heels, singing and

laughing all the time. One day, when the sea was rough, she was with her mother watching the life-boat crew launching their boat for a practising excursion. The extra two shillings a head which sailors get for practising the life-boat in a heavy sea was generally sufficient inducement to them to take out their boat in stormy weather. Janet watched all the preparations with glowing cheeks and eager eyes. A pilot, who was the captain of the life-boat crew, caught Janet's glance and interpreted it right. "Would little miss like to go, ma'am? She'd be safe enow along with me."

"Mother, mother, do let me!" Janet almost shrieked with excitement. There was something in the child's intense eagerness, and perhaps a sudden remembrance of something her husband had said of the value of courage in following a Christian life, that made Mrs. Doncaster resist her desire to say "No" to Janet's appeal. "If it wouldn't be too great a trouble to you to take charge of her, Mr. Gibson." In three minutes Janet was in a cork jacket and an "ile-skin," happier than a princess. Gibson, the pilot, was at the helm; Janet sat at

his feet, taking in the scene—the great grey waves buffeting the boat, often breaking into it and drenching Janet to the skin; the set, rugged faces of the men who were rowing the heavy oars, occasionally giving a grim smile at Janet as a sign that the behaviour of their little passenger met with their approbation. The whole thing made an impression on her imagination that was never effaced. She became in her own thoughts a princess in one of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy-tales, wandering over the northern seas in search of her lost brother. She was just deciding that she was sure they would have to wander seven long years without sight of land, when souse came another wave right over her.

“Here, miss, take this and wrop it round your neck,” said Gibson, handing Janet a small pink cotton pocket-handkerchief. It is probable that Gibson did not himself attribute any special efficacy in tying a more or less damp pocket-handkerchief round your neck when you are thoroughly soaked in sea water; but he felt in his kindly, inarticulate, sailor fashion that the handkerchief

would remind Janet somehow that he was looking after her, and that she had no need to be "afeced."

It is to be hoped that no reader is expecting a hair-breadth escape or any extraordinary display of daring from our heroine. No, the expedition came to an end most prosaically, with no casualty whatever. Janet did not even "catch her death," as the housemaid, who had to dry the little maiden's wet clothes, was sure she would. The incident served one important purpose, however ; it supplied, for a long time, a romantic element in Janet's quiet life. It made her love the sea more than ever ; she imagined herself in storms and shipwrecks ; she got hold of the story of Grace Darling, and made it the theme of a splendid fugue of adventures, in which, however, the central figure was not Grace Darling, but a glorified image of Janet Doncaster. It was a revelation to her one day to hear accidentally that Grace Darling was still living. What a splendid thing it would be, she thought, to live with her in a lighthouse ! And then the theme of the fugue was changed, and there were two Janet

Doncasters rowing a boat to save shipwrecked mariners, lighting the lamp at sunset or cast alone on a desolate rock,—how and why, not particularly explained—knowing that, if they didn't burn a light, there would be shipwrecks during the night, and desperate straits they were put to, to make a light first and then to find fuel to keep it burning.

It was in this vague dream-world that the child's life was passed. She had no little companions to play romping games that would have excluded the possibility of dreaming dreams and seeing visions. Mrs. Doncaster had gradually relinquished all active means of bringing about Janet's conversion. Not that she attributed less importance to the subject, but she was discouraged by the child's want of receptivity to religious ideas. She therefore left off the exhortations and entreaties that at one time had made Janet's little life a burden, and had given herself with increased earnestness to private prayer for her daughter's conversion. In some ways Janet was a gainer by the change of treatment, but, on the other hand, it isolated her very

much from her mother. Their lives touched, but they did not mix. Living under the same roof, with no one in the world besides to care for, this mother and daughter, although they loved each other tenderly, were almost strangers. Mrs. Doncaster lived her life of domestic and charitable duties, devotional reading and prayer; Janet lived her life of lessons with a daily governess and imaginary adventures in a wonder-land of storms and shipwrecks. Neither was in the habit of speaking to the other of what she cared for most. How could Mrs. Doncaster talk to Janet of her absorbing religious aspirations, when she saw that Janet's eyes were counting the number of sparrows on the grass in front of the dining-room window? How could Janet tell her mother of the heroic fairyland of her imagination? If such an idea had ever presented itself to her,—and it certainly never did—she would have laughed outright at its absurdity.

So Janet's young life was very solitary, and she knew less than most children of the world, and how people are expected to think, and speak, and behave in it. If this ignorance had its dangers, it

had the advantage of making her unconventional, and altogether devoid of the artificialities that hide the true structure of character. In her after life, people said of her that they could read her like a book; she had no idea of pretending to be what she was not, or of saying things that were not true because the truth was inconvenient. She could be silent; in fact her childhood was a prolongation of the operation known in nursery language as holding your tongue. But when she spoke she called a spade a spade, in a manner that would have shocked the sensibilities of many boarding-school young ladies. There was another consequence of the solitariness of Janet's childhood that should be mentioned; she had altogether missed the discipline which the friction of association with other children gives. Long after the age at which most children learn to bear disappointments and bruises with tolerable equanimity, Janet was quite babyish in her want of self-control in similar matters. Such influence as her mother and governess had over her was insufficient to strengthen her character in this respect; she required an influence

at once stronger and more sympathetic than theirs. Such an influence as this Janet was so fortunate as to find in a lady who was the English governess in a French school, to which she was sent when she was about fifteen years old.





CHAPTER III.

JANET MAKES A FRIEND. NEW YORK.

T was a very happy accident for Janet that, when she was about fourteen years old, her daily governess left Norborough ; and as the little town did not possess any other inhabitant capable of even making a pretence of educating her, Mrs. Doncaster decided, after making the matter the subject of prayer, to send her to school. The choice of a school had next to be made ; and for several reasons Mrs. Doncaster was induced to select a French Protestant school situated in a village not far removed from Montauban. The reason that had most weight with her in choosing this school was that the evangelical Christianity of French Protestants in general, and of the managers of this school in particular, was notorious.

In the second place, it was much cheaper than any school of the same grade in England ; and thirdly, Mrs. Doncaster shared the general opinion that conversational fluency in a foreign language is the great *desideratum* in female education. So Janet was sent to Dupuy for three years, during which time, besides learning French, she discovered that the evangelical Christianity of the French Protestants runs in a different groove from that of the corresponding party in England. Their views on the subjects of balls, theatres, dress, and every kind of gaiety would satisfy the severest of English Puritans, but their sabbath-breaking would have made Mrs. Doncaster's hair stand on end. She would most cheerfully have gone to the stake rather than do needlework on a Sunday ; but here were M. le Pasteur Brun and his wife, to whom Mrs. Doncaster had written letters of thanks for their kindness in inviting Janet to their house, spending the Sunday evening, the good pastor in playing chess with his son, and Madame Brun in knitting stockings. The difference between the French and English evangelical Sunday was a great revelation to Janet,

who had always been accustomed to hear sabbath-breaking spoken of as a sin comparable in its heinousness with theft and murder. M. Brun's games of chess, and Madame Brun's stockings, could not be accounted for by the general impiety of the family. It was obvious that the pastor and his wife were both simple and sincere in their religious professions ; their Sunday evening occupations led Janet to think for herself on the subject of morals and conduct, and to distinguish between things that were really right or wrong, and those things that were artificially clothed with these attributes by the ingenuity of man. She was materially assisted in forming an opinion on these matters by a lady about ten years older than herself, who came to Dupuy as English governess in the school when Janet had been there about a year. The intimacy that quickly grew up between these two was of the greatest service to Janet. Her friend, Margaret Chesney, had a strong, firm, well-disciplined character ; her knowledge, compared to Janet's ignorance, seemed inexhaustible, and her experience of life gave her twice the advantage of

her years over our little friend. Margaret Chesney in fact supplied the influence which just then Janet most needed. During the holidays, which they spent solitarily in the great empty school-house, Miss Chesney and Janet had endless talks about all things in heaven and earth. For some time Janet was simply a disciple, but as her intellect expanded she became competent to criticise, and therefore to be a real companion to her friend.

Miss Chesney had been a governess from the time she was seventeen. She was thrown on her own resources at that age, entirely unfitted by her previous training and education for teaching, and indeed for almost any work whatsoever. She told Janet that she got 15*l.* a year in her first situation, "and I wasn't worth five," she added; "my teaching was the most ridiculous farce you can conceive. I felt that I was a sham, and I was perfectly wretched and miserable." About that time an old uncle of hers died and left her a hundred pounds; she immediately resigned her situation, took a single room in a little back street near a great educational institution in London, where women and

working men can get taught at a cheap rate, and determined to do nothing but work at her own education as long as her hundred pounds lasted. Her nearest relative, a second cousin, who had constituted himself in a way her guardian, was indignant at what he considered the folly of her conduct.

“You should lay by that hundred pounds against a rainy day,” he had protested, “and not fool it away like this.”

“It’s a rainy day now, cousin, and I am not fooling away the money,” Margaret had replied, continuing, with an inward sense of the comicality of the situation, to say, “I really am not wasting my substance in riotous living; look here!” and she opened a cupboard, on a shelf of which stood a very hard, and ancient, and minute bit of cheese, and a piece of bread that looked rather the worse for wear. “This will be my supper this evening and lunch to-morrow.”

The cousin was not ill-natured; he went home and told his wife that Margaret was as obstinate as a mule; she was starving herself in a garret, and that he wished a small hamper of provisions to be

sent to her regularly every fortnight. This helped out Margaret's hundred pounds for nearly three years, at the end of which time she had qualified herself to take a very good situation in a first-class preparatory school for little boys. She was in a manner forced to get into a school of this kind, as her accomplishments were conspicuous for their absence, and her acquirements were of a more solid kind than are usually marketable in girls' schools or in private families. She was very happy and liked her work much; the desire to do her work as well as possible was always increasing her energy and making her sensible of her own shortcomings. Private study after the day's teaching was over she was always ready to give to the subjects she had grounded herself in at the Davenport Institution; but it was a continual cause of discontent with herself that she did not know French and German well enough to teach them with success. Her dissatisfaction in this respect led her to take situations first in a German and then in a French school, at the latter of which she met Janet.

The kind of education which Janet had received

at Norborough had prepared her to regard her instructors as natural enemies. She never had received any intelligent teaching; Mangnall's Questions, the multiplication table, the Church Catechism, the names of the kings and queens of England, had formed the chief items of the Norborough curriculum. Her first year at Dupuy was chiefly occupied in learning French. When Miss Chesney appeared on the scene she found a pupil, and Janet found a teacher, each after her own heart. That it was possible to enjoy learning was a revelation to Janet that attracted her strongly to Miss Chesney, and it was a new pleasure to Miss Chesney to have a pupil so eager, intelligent, and companionable as Janet. In this way their affection for each other commenced, but before the time came when they both left Dupuy it had found a broader basis than the relationship between pupil and teacher. There was between them the mutual reliance, sympathy, and giving and receiving of ideas that are necessary to a true friendship; and there was also the quick understanding—seeming sometimes almost like an intuition—of what was

passing in each other's mind, which is not infrequently one of the results of strong affection.

When Janet left Dupuy for Norborough, she found her old home not half so dull as it used to be. She had learned to see the world with new eyes; she had learned to fill her life with new interests. Books of all kinds that came in her way she read greedily; she would write about those she liked best to Miss Chesney, and received from her letters in reply, answering and often criticising Janet's criticisms. Margaret Chesney would occasionally send Janet a parcel of books of a kind not to be found in Norborough, and helped her in other ways to fill her life with new interests. It is hardly necessary to say that Norborough disapproved of Janet's way of spending her time. It was pronounced to be "ridiculous and unnatural" for a girl just returned from school to spend her mornings reading big books, instead of dropping in to gossip with Mrs. Sedgely and the Miss Greys. Captain Macduff said "That's where a girl wants a father, to put an end to all that kind of thing and send her into the kitchen to make a pudding."

Mrs. Sedgely wondered how Mrs. Doncaster could allow Janet to act as she did, and with many repetitions of "I may be wrong," "Perhaps it isn't really the case," and "I had rather it wasn't repeated after me," stated as an explanation of the mystery that some people did say that Mrs. Doncaster was out of her mind, and, "if so, of course, what is one to expect from the daughter?" Mr. Grey, as a medical man, had no hesitation in saying that on the subject of religion Mrs. Doncaster might certainly be considered mad, and that Janet very likely had inherited the same tendency, only it had broken out in another direction. "Wonderful work that of Dr. Forbes Winslow's on 'Obscure Diseases of the Brain,'" he would add, to remind his hearers that they were in the presence of a scientific man. Mr. Grey's acquaintance with the work in question consisted of having seen it on the shelves of the library of a physician at Gripping, and the great man had laid his finger on the back of the book as he was showing Mr. Grey out, and had said, "Remarkable work that, sir."

The Norborough people felt it to be a relief

to their feelings to describe Mrs. Doncaster as "cracked," and to say of Janet that she was "as mad as a March hare;" but they really meant no more than that the mother and daughter did not altogether meet with their approval. Nothing is easier or more usual than to call people mad if their way of amusing themselves, or of occupying themselves, is different from our own.

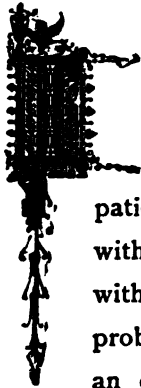




CHAPTER IV.

WHY MRS. DONCASTER WAS A MATCH-MAKING MAMMA.

While ye may, go marry.—HERRICK.

T was one of Mrs. Doncaster's cardinal maxims that it is the vocation of every woman to marry. She had no patience with old maids, and very little with old bachelors. The former she viewed with contempt, the latter with stern disapprobation, as persons who wilfully neglected an obvious duty. She had a sense of uneasiness in connection with Janet's friendship with Margaret Chesney. A woman of nearly thirty, still unmarried, and apparently satisfied to remain unmarried, could not, she feared, be a very suitable companion to her daughter. She would

occasionally ask Janet if there was any prospect of a husband appearing above Miss Chesney's horizon. When Margaret came to spend the summer holidays at Norborough, Mrs. Doncaster asked her daughter if she did not think that Captain Macduff and Miss Chesney would make a very suitable pair. "Well, mamma, they would certainly be a kind of intellectual variety of Beauty and the Beast," Janet laughingly replied. To which Mrs. Doncaster had answered with great gravity—

"Captain Macduff is a most holy man, Janet. I wish I could be as well assured that Miss Chesney had chosen the better part as I am that he has."

Norborough rumour did say that Mrs. Doncaster might have been Mrs. Macduff if she had chosen. There was more probability in this than in most of the Norborough gossip, for it was remarkable that Mrs. Doncaster was much more lenient towards Captain Macduff than to any other bachelor. If he was unmarried, he had done what he could to enter a more blessed state, and it was also noticed that, although Mrs. Doncaster was no match-maker, she was always suggesting all kinds of alliances for him.

To see a single woman was, with Mrs. Doncaster, to remark that she would make an excellent wife for Captain Macduff. Being in a manner responsible for his desolate condition, she had it on her mind that she ought to do her utmost to help him out of it.

As for herself, she considered^d that, being a widow, she had done all that could be required of her by God or man in the way of matrimony. "My beloved husband was taken from me by the visitation of God," she had said, possibly, to Captain Macduff; "I must bear the burden He has laid upon me, and not rebel against His will, which is that I should pass the remainder of my life alone."

After Janet had returned from Dupuy, Mrs. Doncaster, dimly recognising the fact that if you want a girl to get married you must put her in the way of knowing some people whom it would be possible for her to marry, began to cultivate the acquaintance of the Greys and the Ralphs with more cordiality than she had ever shown before. The Ralphs and Greys were not conspicuously religi-

ous ; but Mrs. Doncaster, though she would not have acknowledged so much, even to herself, was inclined to paraphrase the Quaker's advice about getting money, and to say, " My daughter, get married ; to a religious person if thee canst, but get married." She was certainly rather annoyed at Janet's tone of criticism towards the youth of Norborough. George Grey, she said, was exactly like the fat boy in " Pickwick." Had not her mother noticed that the two young Ralphs vied with each other in the splendour of their waistcoats ? And that other young man, staying with the Greys, oh ! he was odious ; his hair was scented with one kind of essence, his pocket-handkerchief with another ; he wore patent leather boots ; he had three rings on one hand, and a glove on the other. Janet supposed that when he had worn out one glove he transferred the rings to the other hand, and wore out its fellow. Mrs. Doncaster began to despair that Janet would ever take a husband from among the Norborough young men ; and she was hardly more disposed to admiration of the Londoners who sometimes visited Norborough in the summer.

One of these was evidently inclined to ecstatic approval of everything in Mrs. Doncaster's establishment, Janet included. It was the most picturesque house it had ever been his good fortune to see; the bow-window in the drawing-room was exquisite, the garden was absolute perfection.

"Pardon me, Miss Doncaster," he said; "I must stop one moment to admire these very remarkable plants. Something quite new, I suppose; how very luxuriantly they grow?"

"Yes," said Janet, with mock gravity, "they are very pretty. They are quite a new acquisition to our flower-garden. They were introduced some little time ago from America, I believe."

"Indeed! I never remember to have seen them before. I am sure my friend, Sir John Cook, would like to order some for his gardens at Crawley Park, immediately. Could you favour me with the name?"

"With pleasure; the name, if I remember rightly, is potato!"

Janet recounted this little scene to her mother, with a merry laugh at the discomfiture of her

would-be admirer ; but Mrs. Doncaster joined very faintly in her daughter's amusement. " I am afraid he thought you very unkind, child. I wish I could see you more thoughtful of the feelings of others."

" Mother, he was such a goose, and so conceited. I am sure it did him good to take him down a little."

" Well, Janet, I hardly know what you mean by a goose. I am sure there was some reason that made him pay us so many visits ; if you think a man a goose for admiring you, you had better resign yourself to a single life at once."

" What a frightful prospect ! " said Janet, with a laugh. " Shall I write to him and tell him I am very sorry he didn't know potatoes were potatoes, and say that I shall be greatly obliged if he will marry me without delay ? "

" My dear child, surely you would never think of doing such a thing," cried poor Mrs. Doncaster, who was totally impervious to a joke.

It should be explained, in defence of Mrs. Doncaster, that her wish to see Janet married was not based simply on the general principle that marriage

is the sphere of women. She was a warm adherent of this general principle, but she also had special reasons for her increasing anxiety to see Janet "settled in life." Nearly the whole of her income was derived from her father, who had promised, on the death of her husband, to make her an allowance of 300*l.* a year for her life, on the supposition that she had no children. Since the first weeks of her widowhood there had been no communication between Mrs. Doncaster and her father on pecuniary matters. He had never offered, and she had never asked, that he should settle upon Janet the same income that he allowed to herself. Mrs. Doncaster, who was not very wise in worldly matters, had for several years a vague impression that her income would be inherited by Janet. Old Mr. Finch, however, had never intended that this should be the case; it was an offence on Janet's part that her name was Doncaster. "If I provide for my own child, I do my duty by her," he had said to himself; "I am not bound to provide for any other man's child. And besides," he argued, as a sop to his conscience, "if anything happened to Mary,

we could take the girl and send her to school ; and if Mary lives, why she ought to save enough out of her income to do for the child."

When Janet returned from Dupuy, Mrs. Doncaster was still in a state of uncertainty as to her father's intentions respecting his granddaughter ; and after a great inward struggle, in which pride and religion were on one side, and motherly instinct on the other, she wrote to the lawyer through whom she received her father's allowance, asking him to tell her if Mr. Finch had made any settlement on Janet after her own death. Pride made the writing of this letter a bitter pill to Mrs. Doncaster ; she was, by implication, asking a favour of those who had hated her husband, and had almost disowned her for loving him. Her disinclination to write the letter was also strengthened by religious sentiment. Was she not showing a great want of faith ? Had she not averred a thousand times that when God sends mouths He sends bread to put into them ? In the stillness of the night the truth seemed borne in upon her with an irresistible sense of conviction that God is able to provide for all the wants of

His people. The next morning at prayers she read with a trembling voice, that touched Janet keenly, though she could not divine the cause of her mother's emotion, various passages from the Bible, describing how the five thousand were fed in the wilderness ; how Elijah was fed by the ravens ; how the widow's cruse did not fail nor the barrel of meal waste ; how not a single sparrow falls to the ground "without your Father." Her eyes saw nothing but Janet's brilliant young face, as she concluded in a low, solemn voice, "Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."

The letter was written, however, the combined forces of pride and religion notwithstanding. The matter had taken such a hold of Mrs. Doncaster that she could rest neither day nor night with the thought that her death would leave Janet almost penniless, and practically alone in the world. The knowledge that her grandfather intended to do nothing for her would be preferable, she thought, to her present uncertainty. So she wrote, as we have seen, to the lawyer, Mr. Broadley ; who replied, by return of post, that his friend and client,

Mr. Finch, had never made any communication of his intentions respecting Miss Janet Doncaster. Mr. Broadley had drawn the marriage settlements of Mr. Finch's other daughters, and he knew that in each of their cases the money had been settled absolutely on themselves, and in case of their having a family on their children. Mrs. Doncaster had had no marriage settlement, and the allowance made to her by her father was not subject to any agreement whatever. Mr. Finch had simply directed his solicitor to pay to Mrs. Doncaster the annual sum of 300*l.* until further notice. The lawyer was an old friend of the family, and of course knew the circumstances of Mrs. Doncaster's marriage. He also knew that the subject was a very delicate one with Mr. Finch. He, however, determined, after the receipt of Mrs. Doncaster's letter, to broach the matter to his client on the first opportunity. This opportunity presented itself about a fortnight after the receipt of Mrs. Doncaster's letter, when Mr. Broadley had been dining with Mr. Finch, and the two old gentlemen were sitting together over their wine after dinner. Mr.

Broadley, apologising for introducing a business subject, reminded Mr. Finch that the allowance made to Miss Mary rested on a rather unsatisfactory footing. "Assuming, of course, that Miss Mary has given you no further cause for displeasure, I should venture to suggest that it would be better for the family in every respect if a settlement were made upon her and her child, similar to the settlements made on Miss Emily and Miss Jane. At present, in the event of your death, Miss Mary would have nothing, absolutely nothing; and I think I know you well enough to say that it is not in accordance with your wishes that your eldest daughter should be reduced to penury."

He paused for a reply; but Mr. Finch's eyes were lowered, his lips compressed, and as he said nothing, Mr. Broadley went on: "I know, my dear friend, I am touching on a painful subject. Still, at our time of life we must look forward sometimes to the end. I thought possibly you might not distinctly understand the position Miss Mary would occupy in the event of your death, unless

you either settle some property upon her or provide for her in your will."

"As she has made her bed, so she must lie on it!"

"No, no, my dear sir," urged the lawyer; "you have not acted on that principle; you have been allowing her 300*l.* a year for eighteen years; so far as immediate income goes you have treated her just the same as your other daughters. Think what a scandal it would cause through the whole circle of your acquaintances, to know—and they would find it out—that your eldest daughter and her child were absolutely destitute!"

He had touched the right chord at last. Mr. Finch had never forgiven his daughter, and the argument which took the form of "What will people say?" had much more effect than any argument based on parental duty or on general principles of justice.

"Well," he growled, "you lawyers generally know how to get your own way. Settle 6,000*l.* of India Five per Cents on her. I won't have any mention of her in my will; mind that."

“ I am sure you will never regret your decision. I suppose I am to draw a deed settling the property on her, with remainder to Miss Doncaster. That is a point which your daughter is naturally anxious about.”

Directly these last words were out of his lips he saw he had made a mistake. A savage look came into the face of the old man before him, not only at the name of Doncaster, which Mr. Broadley had before discreetly avoided using, but at the admission that Mrs. Doncaster had been in communication with him on the subject. Mr. Finch brought his fist down on the table with a blow that made the glasses jingle.

“ D— her, she's been at you about that brat, has she ? Tell her that as Miss Doncaster is much too pious to be allowed to come and stay with her sinful grandfather, I'm too pious to make any provision for her. What do such saints as them want with India Five per Cents ? Ha, ha, ha ! ”

When Mr. Finch was in a passion his grammar generally failed him. Mr. Broadley was quite disconcerted at the result of his own blundering. Just

when he was getting his own way an unlucky word had destroyed all the impression he had been able to make upon his amiable client.

"No, no, no," continued the old man with a demoniacal chuckle, "Miss Doncaster won't get any of my money. She can lay up for herself treasure in heaven ; I shan't interfere with her doing that, Broadley. I'll do what's right by my daughter, but I'll be d—d if ever a stiver of mine shall go to that d—d Doncaster lot."

"What am I then to understand your wishes are with regard to the settlement ?" said Mr. Broadley, whose courage was rapidly evaporating.

"My wishes ; yes, I'll tell 'em to you fast enough. Settle the interest of 6,000*l.* India Five per Cents on Mary for her life, and at her death hand the stock over to the Red Hill Idiot Asylum."

"You are not serious, Mr. Finch ?"

"Not serious, sir, what d'ye mean ? I was never more serious in my life. Do as I have said, and let's hear no more about it."

Neither of the gentlemen was able to enjoy his claret after this, so the lawyer soon took his leave,

very much oppressed by the sense of his own failure. If he had dropped the subject directly Mr. Finch had consented to a settlement, and had drawn a deed in which Janet was made to succeed her mother, old Mr. Finch would probably have signed it, when it was ready, without any outbreak of temper at all. Mr. Broadley had not known before that Mrs. Doncaster had refused to let Janet visit her grandparents. "She must be a poor thing after all," he said inwardly as he reached his own door. And he dismissed Mrs. Doncaster's affairs from his mind for the time, with the reflection which he had protested against in Mr. Finch—"As she has made her bed, so she must lie on it."

Mr. Finch's resolution proved to be immovable, and Mr. Broadley had to communicate to Mrs. Doncaster the painful fact that her father would make no provision for his granddaughter. Mr. Broadley tried to make his letter as little disagreeable as possible by saying that in all probability Miss Doncaster would have ceased to be Miss Doncaster long before the event took place which would transfer Mrs. Doncaster's income to the "charitable in-

stitution selected by Mr. Finch ;" and that he had at least the satisfaction of telling her that her income was now certain for her own life, and did not in any way depend on that of her father. The lawyer also hinted that in the melancholy event of Mrs. Doncaster's death during her father's lifetime, he had little doubt that Mr. Finch would relent, and that Janet would find a home under her grandfather's roof.

In spite of her faith, Mrs. Doncaster turned cold and sick as she read this letter. Janet was away from home at the time, spending the summer holidays with Miss Chesney, and Mrs. Doncaster was alone in her misery. She stood at her open bedroom window, crushing the hated letter in her hands. For a long time she stood there with a fixed, rigid face, hardly thinking, hardly seeing the scene that lay before her. She was filled with a vague sense of misery. Suddenly the loud sweet notes of a lark broke the silence, and with the silence broke the kind of trance that held Mrs. Doncaster. The vague sense of suffering was changed into a bitter enumeration of her misfor-

tunes. All her life had been a series of disappointments. Her husband had been taken from her ; her child, with the most loving and honest heart in the world, had grown away from her ; Janet was not a Christian, her mother was not her chief friend ; and now, to crown all these misfortunes, came another, that this passionately loved child might be left alone in the world, penniless and almost friendless. Mrs. Doncaster thought of the hymn—

Poor, weak, and worthless though I am,
I have a rich Almighty Friend ;

and her sorrow deepened. "I have not even the consolation that Janet has sought this rich Almighty Friend," she thought. At last she turned with an almost angry gesture away from the window. Why was the sky so blue and serene ? why did the rippling waves seem to kiss the shore, and trees and flowers to smile up at the sky, as if there were no such things as sin and misery in the world ? She drew the curtains to shut out the sight of the incongruous and unsympathetic calm and loveliness.

The intensity of Mrs. Doncaster's feelings was before long driven into another direction. She was filled with remorse and self-reproach at her own want of faith. The Sunday after the receipt of Mr. Broadley's letter the clergyman at Norborough preached from the text, "The Lord will provide," and Mrs. Doncaster accepted this as a divine message of comfort directed especially to herself. Her peace of mind gradually returned, and after it was restored her course of conduct was readily determined. In the first place she would tell Janet nothing of what her circumstances really were. If she did tell her she was sure Janet would insist on being a governess, or taking immediate steps to earn her own living ; and Mrs. Doncaster was sure that it was not the Lord's will that Janet should do this. It certainly was not Mrs. Doncaster's. In the second place Mrs. Doncaster was confident that Janet would marry very soon, and that her own life would be prolonged many years after that desired event took place. In the third place she would begin at once to insure her own life for Janet's benefit. Hence arose Mrs. Doncaster's strong de-

sire that Janet should marry, and her uneasiness at Janet's critical attitude towards the golden youth of Norborough. She was sometimes startled at finding herself even more anxious for Janet's marriage than for her conversion ; but she quieted her conscience with the reflection that Janet would be much more likely to be converted after marriage than before it. She had been trying for eighteen years to convert the unmarried Janet ; who could tell that the conversion of the married Janet would not be an easier task ?

Mrs. Doncaster's intention to insure her life in Janet's favour was not acted on immediately. Every one knows the hundred and one excuses which people unaccustomed to move from place to place make to put off a journey ; and the life insurance could not be effected without going to London. Mrs. Doncaster thought she could not possibly leave home just at present, because her old servant was having a holiday, and the idea of leaving a woman she had only known for three years in sole charge of the little house seemed quite out of the question. Then Mrs. Doncaster was helping to

nurse a sick child of a poor neighbour, and there was to be a missionary meeting next week ; and next Sunday was Sacrament Sunday, and she was always anxious to abstract herself from worldly matters at such periods. Thus ten days slipped by, and then Janet came home, and the difficulties of going to London increased. How could Mrs. Doncaster make the journey, and keep Janet in ignorance as to its cause ? The only practical step which she took in the matter was to write a letter to Mr. Broadley, asking his advice as to the choice of an office and the best means of accomplishing the insurance. Mrs. Doncaster was astonished to receive in reply a note from Mr. Broadley advising her not to insure her life at all. He told her, what she was altogether ignorant of before, that the premiums necessary to effect an insurance of the life of a person as old as herself were very heavy ; and Mr. Broadley's counsel to her was to save what she could and invest it in Janet's name. And thus for a time the project of the insurance was dropped.



CHAPTER V.

THE TENANTS OF NORBOROUGH HALL.



ABOUT a month after Janet's return an event occurred which put every Norborian in a flutter of excitement. Mrs. Sedgely ran about, making at least a dozen calls a day, beseeching her friends not to repeat on her authority what she was going to tell them. Mrs. Grey was graciousness itself, and put her name with the greatest readiness on the back of Mrs. Sedgely's bills, which proclaimed the great news to the Norborough world that "The Hall" was let to a family whose mere presence in Norborough would at once raise it to the rank of a fashionable watering-place. At first the wealth of the new comers was reported to be prodigious, and their

rank such as would sink into insignificance all the minor distinctions observed in Norborough society. Mrs. Sedgely would not vouch for the number of horses that were being sent down, but she had seen with her own eyes in Slick's shop the paper that Lady Ann had chosen for the *boudoir* (volumes would be needed to convey the mysterious awe with which this word was uttered), and she reported that it was one of extraordinary magnificence. The Miss Greys hoped that they would be able at last to settle a discussion which had long raged between them, as to what was the most fashionable shape for autumn bonnets. The Miss Greys always dressed alike, and when therefore they could not agree on the shape of a bonnet, or the length of a mantle, their differences not infrequently assumed all the bitterness of theological discussions.

"Now, Jane, we shall see who is right," said the elder sister, as they entered at the old porch door on the Sunday when Lady Ann Leighton and Mrs. Leighton were expected to appear in the Norborough church for the first time.

The new tenants of the hall were the two ladies

just mentioned, and a young man of about three and twenty, the only son of Mrs. Leighton. Lady Ann and Mrs. Leighton were widows. They had married two brothers. Lady Ann's husband had been the owner of a very good estate in Barsetshire. As he had died childless, the estate, which was entailed, had gone to the son of the second brother. When first Lady Ann was a widow she wrote to her sister-in-law, suggesting that they should live together, and bring up the little heir. "You shall be his mother, and I will be his father," she said. Lady Ann had in fact set her heart on this arrangement, and as she was accustomed to have her own way in everything, she had it in this. She soon assumed a complete mastery over her mild little sister-in-law. It was she who regulated their joint expenditure; it was she who decided where they should go and whom they should visit; it was she who chose governesses and tutors for the little boy who rejoiced in the names of Charles Reginald Grenville Leighton Leighton. In fact, she undertook the entire responsibility of his education. Her sister-in-law's attitude towards her was a mixture

of fear and adoration. Never was there, she thought, in all the world anyone so good or so clever as Ann. There was nothing she liked so much as to be praised or petted by her ruler, and she dreaded nothing so much as her disapprobation. The highest praise which Mrs. Leighton could bestow on any human being was, "There is something about her which reminds me a little, a *very* little, of course, of Lady Ann." She felt herself to be inestimably blest by the protection and advice of her sister-in-law; indeed her life would have been almost insupportable if she had not had some strong arm to lean on. Naturally of a timid, shrinking, and diffident disposition, Mrs. Leighton had also been oppressed by a weight of misfortune that might well have crushed a stronger spirit. She clung to Lady Ann as a suffering child clings to its mother. She did whatever Lady Ann suggested with a gentle docility, not wishing to have all the reasons which prompted the suggestion explained to her, but resting in perfect confidence that Ann knew it would be better for her or Charlie, that such and such a course should be adopted.

It was, of course, Lady Ann who had decided on leaving Leighton Court for a few years, and who had taken Norborough Hall for her nephew and sister-in-law. Although Mrs. Leighton was quite content to be told that Norborough would be a pleasant change after living so long at Leighton Court, yet it may be well to explain to the reader more fully Lady Ann's motives for leaving a pleasant country-house in a good neighbourhood, in which the name of Leighton was a passport everywhere, to take up her abode in a dreary little seaside village like Norborough. Even in the days of "the Squire Westerns," the Leightons of Leighton Court had been noted as hard drinkers, and for several generations before the birth of Lady Ann's nephew, drunkenness had been an hereditary disease in the Leighton family. Lady Ann's husband had not himself been a drunkard, but he had died at an early age from one of the diseases engendered by the drunken habits of his ancestry. Mrs. Leighton's husband had died in *delirium tremens*. Knowing these facts Lady Ann had consulted the old family physician, and had insist-

ed on his telling her all he knew about the drinking propensities of other deceased members of the Leighton family; she also questioned him very closely on the probability of the family disease breaking out in little Charlie. He bade her have no fear on her nephew's account. "Bring the little fellow up, as much as possible, with other boys. He is not very strong at present, but do all you can to strengthen his constitution, and he will never give you any trouble in the way you imagine." Lady Ann did her best to follow the doctor's advice, but she could not dismiss the matter from her mind. She watched the child narrowly. One thing allayed her anxiety considerably. Little Charlie was the image of his mother, both in personal and mental characteristics. The Leightons were all high-spirited, noisy, and self-willed, with plenty of animal courage, and with a passionate devotion to field sports. Little Charlie was docile, gentle, and quiet. He never was obstinate and never was sulky, as self-willed children are when they are required to submit themselves to their elders. Lady Ann noticed that his hand clasped

hers with a nervous timidity when they passed the kennels where some big mastiffs were kept. "He's his mother's child more than his father's," she thought, and the reflection comforted her. When Charlie was about eight years old, it was suggested by the doctor that he ought to learn to ride, and that the exercise would do him good. Lady Ann assented, and a Shetland pony, not much bigger than a good-sized Newfoundland dog, was presented to the little lad. He talked with great eagerness about his pony, but when the time came for the first mount, he turned perfectly sick with fright. His face was white to the lips; tears stood in his eyes, and he trembled from head to foot.

"Dobson shall lead the pony, and James shall hold you on, darling," said his mother, in a reassuring voice; but his only answer was a flood of tears.

"Never mind about it now. Take the pony round again, Dobson," said Lady Ann; adding, to her sister-in-law, "We will get little George Gregory to come here with his pony, and Charlie will get over his timidity when he sees another child enjoying a ride."

Lady Ann was thinking, with great satisfaction, "The child is not a Leighton ;" when her sister-in-law interrupted her thoughts by saying in a desponding tone, "I am afraid Charlie gets this nervousness from me ; how I wish he were more like his dear father."

"Good heavens, Emily !" broke out Lady Ann. "How can you say you wish him to be like his father ?"

Almost for the first time in her life Mrs. Leighton thought Lady Ann unkind. She longed to cherish the luxury of investing her dead husband with imaginary virtues and of covering all his faults with oblivion. Lady Ann had reminded her roughly that her married life had given her no right to cherish tender memories, and that her widowhood could not be filled by an inextinguishable sense of loss. She made no reply, but Lady Ann saw that her eyes filled with tears, and she was touched by pity for the gentle, clinging nature. Lady Ann took her hand and placed it within her own arm.

"I cannot forget and forgive, even the dead," she said, in a low voice. And then she added, after

a pause, "I did not mean to pain you, dear, but I want your boy to be more like his mother than his father."

"All through Charlie Leighton's childhood and youth, Lady Ann's almost unceasing occupation was to find pleasant companions for him, to engage first-rate tutors to teach him, who would interest the boy in study, and who would influence his character for good. Summer travels and yachting expeditions were planned for him. Lady Ann was determined that, if the curse of the Leightons did overtake him, it should not be for want of subjects of interest and healthy means of amusement. All the people about the boy reported him to be docile and affectionate, but with a timid, nervous disposition; and the more acute perceived in him a want of moral backbone. He was very good at home, and very good with those who had been specially chosen by Lady Ann as his teachers and companions; he was good because everyone about him encouraged him to be so; no idea of thwarting their wishes ever entered into his mind. But how would it be with him when he had to mix with people whose influ-

ence on him would be good, bad, or indifferent? That was a question to which his home education supplied no means of giving an answer. When Charlie was about fifteen, his tutor urged on Lady Ann very strongly the desirability of sending him to a public school, on the ground that it would strengthen his character, make him self-reliant, and give him some preparation for the real world which he would be obliged to enter sooner or later. These arguments coincided with considerations that had for some time been in Lady Ann's mind; she dreaded making the boy a milksop, and she was by this time pretty confident that there was not a bit of Leighton in him, and that he would consequently escape the hereditary propensity to drink. So Charlie was sent to Eton, and for a year or two Lady Ann watched the results of his life there so far as they were visible in his outward demeanour with satisfaction. But one day she received an alarm, in hearing from the master of the house where Charlie was that the boy had got into a bad set, and that he wished to consult with Mrs. Leighton about him. On an occasion like

this Mrs. Leighton was utterly helpless ; so Lady Ann hurried to Eton, where she had a long interview with the master about Charlie. He began by saying that he thought the great defect in the boy was weakness rather than natural viciousness ; that he was completely led away by whatever companions he happened to be with. Lady Ann felt that there was something more to come ; she would not have been sent for from Barsetshire to Eton to hear general observations on Charlie's character.

“ Has this weak disposition led to any definite breach of the rules of the house ? ” she asked, with a sinking heart. The master's reply was what she most dreaded to hear. He told her her nephew had twice been found intoxicated, and that it would be absolutely necessary to remove him from the school. The look of blank and hopeless misery that came over Lady Ann's face as she heard this almost frightened her companion. She said not a single word, but her features seemed to age as he looked at them. He took her hand and said very kindly, “ Don't despair about the poor fellow. He is very young yet ; and he is extremely sensitive

to good as well as to bad influences. When I talked to him on the subject on the first occasion he was deeply moved, and promised amendment with great earnestness, which I firmly believe was sincere at the time."

"Sincere at the time? Yes, that is the worst of it. He hasn't strength of character enough to hold to what he knows is best."

The interview came to an end very sadly, and the same afternoon Charles and his aunt left Eton. She talked to him about the cause of his departure with a passionate earnestness that would have affected a much less sensitive nature than his. He wept; he cursed his own folly; he promised by all that was sacred that he would never again be guilty of the slightest approach to intemperance. Then Lady Ann talked to him very gently about his mother, and the intolerable grief which a knowledge of what had happened would bring upon her. Again Charlie protested his repentance for the past and his resolution for the future; and this time he could not help saying that he would never have caused this trouble if it had not been for Harrison

and Courtenay. It was a secret consolation to him to tell himself that naturally he was the best fellow in the world, and that anything he did which was wrong was the fault of some one else. There was some truth in this consolatory reflection, but it should have been supplemented by the consideration that whatever he did that was good was also due to some one else. The weakness which he had inherited from his mother was the reverse of a protection to him in subduing the propensity which he had inherited from his father. Lady Ann was not satisfied with Charlie's penitence. She believed him to be sincere, but she would have had more confidence in the strength of his resolutions if he had said less on the subject. Still she did not despair ; even though her fears as to the vitality of his repentance was realised, she refused to give up hope. Charles Leighton had occasional fits of drunkenness, which were frequent and prolonged in proportion as the watchful surveillance by which he was protected was relaxed. Between these fits of intoxication he would be abjectly penitent and full of remorse. As long as these feelings lasted he would

touch nothing stronger than water, and in this way his constitution did not suffer so much as his aunt and mother feared it would from his occasional excesses. Among the various means which Lady Ann adopted to induce him to maintain habits of temperance she found the most effectual to be the personal influence of those whose society he enjoyed, and of whom he was also slightly in awe. Lady Ann had herself this personal ascendancy over him, and she believed that anyone with a moderate share of moral strength could acquire it. Without any very great difficulty she had contrived to find a succession of young men who, under the pretence of being Mr. Leighton's travelling tutors, or his secretaries, were really engaged in order to exercise this moral authority over him. Lady Ann acquired great quickness in picking out persons who were especially capable of this kind of work. She had once seen a butler standing behind the chair of one of her friends, and had said to herself, "That would be the very man for Charlie; he wants some one in that capacity to relieve Mr. Forsyth (the "secretary" for the time being). Being used to have her

own way, she managed to annex the butler without offending her friend, and the man became one of her most valuable coadjutors in the wearing task of "managing Charlie." The man was, in fact, so successful, that her nephew never had a single outbreak as long as he was solely in Marston's charge. Lady Ann placed the utmost possible confidence in his powers.

At the time when Mrs. Leighton and Lady Ann came to Norborough, Marston had been Mr. Leighton's valet for two years. He had travelled with his master on the Continent several times, and only twice had he, as Marston expressed it, given him the slip. Lady Ann and Mrs. Leighton were beginning to hope that the evil habit had been in a great measure subdued. Still, none of the precautions were relaxed; the secretary and the valet were still constantly on their guard. When Marston had been at Leighton Court a year, the establishment there was broken up. The new valet's success was so encouraging that Lady Ann thought that an entire change of scene and manner of life would be advisable in order to blot out, as far as

possible, all the unhappy associations of the past. So Leighton Court was temporarily shut up, and, after a year's travelling, the two ladies and Mr. Leighton settled down at Norborough Hall, which they took for a couple of years, and with it some first-rate pheasant and partridge shooting. Lady Ann had decided on Norborough in preference to the other places that were available, on account of its sporting advantages, and also because it would be a good place to keep a yacht. Shooting and yachting were Mr. Leighton's favourite pursuits. If he could have these, he did not mind the place being dull or the climate being bleak ; and Lady Ann and Mrs. Leighton would have lived on an iceberg if doing so would have furthered the fulfilment of their hopes with regard to his future.





CHAPTER VI.

NORBOROUGH MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF THE ARISTOCRACY.



HE agitation of Norborough on the advent of the Leighton family was profound. The Miss Greys went to their home after church on the Sunday when Lady Ann and Mrs. Leighton had first occupied "the Hall pew," sadder and wiser women. They were convinced that they had both held opinions on the subject of bonnets that were fundamentally erroneous. Neither of them had the consolation of saying to the other, "I told you so." The Parisian inventions which formed the headgear of the Leighton ladies were something that it had never entered into the heart of a Norborough belle even to con-

ceive. The only consideration that gave them any satisfaction was that everyone else in Norborough had been as ill-informed as themselves as to the latest revelation of fashionable truth from Paris.

The most important practical question for the Norborians to decide was, whether it would be becoming in them to call on the new comers. There were many pros and cons to be considered. Mrs. Sedgely was inclined to be against calling. Her summer dresses were all more or less in a state of dilapidation, and she had not yet anything new for the winter. She did not allege this reason, but it weighed very heavily with her. Mrs. Ralph was on Mrs. Sedgely's side ; she was a timid, shy woman, and the stiffest black silk in the world would not prevent her from feeling utterly miserable if she found herself face to face with an earl's daughter. Mrs. Grey on the other hand thought that they were bound in common courtesy to call ; a doctor's wife is very generally catholic in her interpretation of the social duties. Captain Macduff thought that anyone who held the Queen's commission was equal "to the highest in the land,"

and he asserted his intention of calling, even if he were the only Norborian who did so. But what really turned the scale in favour of the calling party was a report brought by Mrs. Sedgely that Lieutenant Smalley had said, with an expression which Mrs. Sedgely would not soil her lips by repeating, that he didn't know anything about the Leightons, and that he cared less ; they might be a pack of swindlers for anything he knew, like that fellow who called himself the Hon. Plantagenet Stanley, and who ran away from Norborough in the middle of the night, after living there (on credit) for six months in magnificent style. No words were sufficiently strong to mark the disapprobation of the Norborians at this speech. Captain Macduff showed his superior knowledge of Debrett by saying—"The insult is worthy of Mr. Smalley's ignorance as well as of his impudence. Lady Ann Leighton is the third daughter of the late Earl of Comberbatch, of Comberbatch Castle. The family name is Quane." The information impressed his hearers deeply with his knowledge of the aristocracy, and when he added, "If this un-

fortunate insinuation should reach Lady Ann Leighton, I am sure she will feel it deeply ; I shall call to-morrow afternoon to show that I, for one, give no sanction to it ;" then all the *élite* of Norborough felt that if they did not call they would be supposed to adopt Lieutenant Smalley's suggestion, and to hold that the third daughter of the late Earl of Comberbatch was a possible swindler. So the calls were made ; the Norborough ladies arrayed themselves "in all they had of rich," and sallied forth with a parasol in one hand and a mother-of-pearl card-case in the other, attended by such persons of the masculine persuasion as happened to be members of their households. In the matter of making and receiving calls, it must be admitted that the female intellect asserts its superiority in a manner that cannot be mistaken. A lady never feels herself so thoroughly master of the situation as when she takes her husband with her to make a call. When Mr. Sedgely accompanied Mrs. Sedgely to call on Lady Ann and Mrs. Leighton, he occupied himself principally in stroking the outside of his shiny hat, and then in gazing

fixedly at the lining, as if he were anxious to fix the maker's name indelibly in his memory ; whereas Mrs. Sedgely, timid as she naturally was, painfully conscious as she felt that Lady Ann would instantly perceive that her dress had been turned and that her gloves had been mended, was equal to the occasion. She discoursed with respectful fluency on the salubrity of the Norborough air ; she hoped that Lady Ann had admired the church ; she trusted Mr. Leighton would find the shooting as good as he expected, and that Mrs. Leighton admired the gardens at the Hall.

Mrs. Doncaster did not neglect the fulfilment of what Norborough had pronounced to be the duty of all right-thinking persons, viz., to call at the Hall. Mrs. Sedgely had come in to her house immediately after she had left the presence of the " august strangers," as the Leightons were called in the " Norborough Magazine." Mrs. Doncaster was out, but Janet was quite willing to hear all that Mrs. Sedgely had to tell about her visit.

" I will own my heart did beat rather fast when I found myself in the drawing-room," she said.

"But you really must go, dear Janet, and your dear mamma too. I am sure you are not afraid of anyone ; and Lady Ann is—— Well, I hardly know how to describe it. You feel, of course, that there is a great difference, you know, between an earl's daughter and yourself, and yet she is very affable. Oh, yes, extremely affable. After a little time, I quite enjoyed talking to her."

"It's rather an alarming prospect, Mrs. Sedgely," laughed Janet. "It's a case of 'glad homage pay with awful mirth,' isn't it?"

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Sedgely, "it's a duty we owe to our superiors in rank. That's how I've come to look at it. I don't mind telling you in confidence, that at first I thought I really had nothing fit to make the call in. But then, when I heard what Lieutenant Smalley had said, I felt that go I must, and that it would be just as wrong to give up going because I hadn't a new dress ready, as it would be to give up going to church because I didn't happen to have a new bonnet."

"Oh, never mind, Mrs. Sedgely; mamma and I will go and do our duty like Britons. We are so

used to wearing old clothes that they won't disturb our peace of mind at all."

"Now, you know I didn't mean that, dear. I always say there isn't a prettier dress in Norborough than that grey one you had this summer. I know it is sinful to notice dresses and things too much in church. I dare say now your mamma never knows the least in the world what the people in the next pew are wearing. But do what I will I cannot help noticing things a little, and I always like the look of you, coming into church in that grey dress."

"But you won't admire it any more now, Mrs. Sedgely. Lady Ann and Mrs. Leighton are so magnificent, that all our lesser lights are put out."

More critical eyes than good-natured Mrs. Sedgely's might well have admired Janet "coming into church in that grey dress." Tall, slight, erect, with a buoyant step that indicated youth and health, simple and perfectly unaffected to a degree that showed she had some of the elements of real dignity of manner and character, she also possessed unusually beautiful features. Her hair was dark, and

her eyes were of that clear greyish blue colour that sometimes goes with dark hair and a clear complexion. Her eyes were, perhaps, her most remarkable feature; they were so perfectly calm and fearless; they spoke to those who were able to interpret them of the tenacity and honesty of her character. This was their expression when at rest; when Janet was talking, or being talked to, they had a hundred expressions. Her eyes, for instance, more than any other feature, expressed the sense of humour with which she was largely endowed. It is impossible to attempt an inventory of our heroine's features, or, like the lady in *Twelfth Night*, "give out divers schedules" of her beauty. It is, however, necessary that the reader should understand that Janet's whole appearance indicated decision of character, and that, together with unusual beauty, she had the air of one to whom authority came naturally, and also that the ingenuousness of her character was expressed in her features. When she went with her mother to teach in the Norborough infant school, the naughtiest children were always handed over to her, because they then never

dared to be rebellious. Her power of command was amusingly illustrated by her effect on screaming children. When nurses and mothers were in despair, Janet would simply speak to the child and tell it to be quiet ; it usually shut its mouth immediately, looked very much astonished, and did as it was bid.

Mrs. Doncaster and Janet were the last of the Norborians who called on Lady Ann and Mrs. Leighton ; so the four ladies had several opportunities of seeing each other in church and in the village before they formally made each other's acquaintance. Lady Ann and Janet were mutually impressed in each other's favour before they had exchanged any civilities. The elder lady's queenly air and general magnificence did not prevent the younger one from feeling that she would soon be at her ease with her ; and Lady Ann, on her side, expressed her self very warmly to Mrs. Leighton in praise of Miss Doncaster's appearance. " She is perfection, Emily, both in style and in feature. How can such a girl have dropped down into a little out-of-the-way place like this ? What a

mouth and chin she has !” If Lady Ann had seen such a mouth and chin in a man, she would have engaged their possessor for her nephew. She even began to cast about in her own mind, whether it wouldn’t be possible to get Janet as companion to Mrs. Leighton, and afterwards use her for Charlie. But she dismissed the idea as impracticable ; first, on the general ground of the inconvenience of putting a young woman to be a kind of keeper to a young man, and secondly, on the ground that in all probability Janet’s manners were very inferior to her appearance. The favourable impression she had formed was, however, increased by a further acquaintance with Norborough and its inhabitants. The rector took Lady Ann and Mrs. Leighton over his schools, where he explained to them that of all his young lady parishioners Miss Doncaster was the most useful among the children. “ I am afraid she is rather a strong-minded young lady, but really strong-mindedness is not altogether out of place in managing some of these children, and we always hand over the most troublesome to Miss Doncaster. She has an extraordinary power over

them. I once said to her, ' Really, Miss Doncaster, I think Rarey—Rarey, the horsebreaker ; perhaps your ladyship may have heard of such a person—I think Rarey must have told you one of his secrets."

Again Lady Ann regretted that Janet was not a man. " She would have been exactly what we want for Charlie," she thought.

It so happened that when Mrs. Doncaster and Janet did call at Norborough Hall it was on the very day that Mr. Leighton and his suite—consisting of his secretary Mr. Forsyth, and his valet Marston—were expected to arrive. They were coming from abroad after nearly a year's absence. Mr. Leighton had made extensive purchases of art treasures of various descriptions in Rome, Florence, and other places, and the hall was filled with wooden packing-cases sent on by the travellers, who were detained in London. Lady Ann and Mrs. Leighton were naturally very full of the expected arrivals. Mrs. Leighton, indeed, could hardly speak of anything else.

" You know, Miss Doncaster," she said, " or

rather I should say, perhaps, you do not know, that I haven't seen my son for a year. He arrived in London four days ago, and then of course I thought he would be here the next day, but he said he must stay in London to get some clothes. I wrote and told him he was a sad fellow, and that I believed he cared more about seeing Poole than his mother; but Mr. Forsyth wrote to assure me" (this was said quite seriously), "that I shouldn't know my own son if I saw him in the clothes he wore abroad. Now do you think a person's dress can make so much difference?"

Janet, who had been making an inward comment on the repose of manner that marks the caste of Vere de Vere, replied, with a smile, "I expect Mr. Leighton thinks this place is a perfect wilderness, and that he could no more get clothes here than in the middle of the bush in Australia. Indeed, I shouldn't wonder if he continues to think so, even after he has seen the masterpieces of the Norborough tailor."

"Speaking of masterpieces, Charlie has brought the most lovely things from Rome. Mr. Forsyth

is an excellent judge of pictures, and he says Charlie's collection is quite delightful. We have not had time to have them unpacked yet; when they are disinterred from their boxes and shavings and wrappers, you must come and see us again, and we will show them to you."

Janet was expressing her thanks, when Lady Ann joined in the conversation. "You are speaking of Charlie's treasures. We have not had them unpacked yet, because they are my nephew's special pets, and we were sure that he would like to have them unpacked and arranged under his own eye. It will give him several mornings' hard work, but he doesn't mind hard work if it is in connection with his beloved pictures."

Here Mrs. Doncaster asked if Mr. Leighton had not been greatly pained during his visit to Rome by the horrors of the Papacy.

Mrs. Leighton said, "Ah, yes, yes; I shouldn't wonder if he was. I hadn't thought about it before. Ann, has Charlie said anything about it in his letters?"

"Young men are rather careless about such

things, Mrs. Doncaster," said Lady Ann ; " and I am afraid my nephew would say the worst thing connected with the papal authority in Rome is the shocking sanitary state of the city. He says Victor Emmanuel is going to alter all that, and Rome will become as well paved, drained, and lighted as St. Pancras."

Janet was full of the passion for travel which attacks nearly all young people. She made Lady Ann talk to her about Rome and Florence, while Mrs. Doncaster was endeavouring to awaken a sense of "the horrors of the Papacy" in Mrs. Leighton. When the mother and daughter left, their thoughts were both occupied by the magic word "Rome." Mrs. Doncaster, however, used the word in a religious, and Janet in an artistic, sense. Janet had promised to come up to the Hall again in two days to see the pictures when they were unpacked. Mrs. Doncaster had promised to send Mrs. Leighton a series of tracts, "Papal Pretensions Unmasked," "A Brand Snatched from the Burning," "Spiritual Wickedness in High Places," "Papists, Beware," which she hoped

would be useful, not only in reclaiming Mr. Leighton to the true faith, if he had suffered any relapse in consequence of his sojourn in Rome, but also in convincing Mrs. Leighton of the risk she had permitted her son to run in sending him into that place so full of pitfalls dug by the enemy of souls. Just as Janet was saying to herself, "I would give ten years of my life to see the great cities of Italy," Mrs. Doncaster was inwardly remarking that she would not, on any consideration, allow her daughter to run the risk which Mrs. Leighton had so lightly permitted her son to incur.

Mrs. Doncaster was always very liberal in her distribution of violently Protestant tracts, and she found, on returning home, that her stock had run low, and that she had not a single copy left of the brochure entitled "Papists, Beware." This she had considered would be so very suitable to Mr. Leighton, because it was conceived in the spirit of a notice to poachers, a kind of abstract of the Spiritual Game Laws and the penalties incurred by breaking them. "Papists, Beware" was a parody on "Trespassers, Beware," and the whole of the

four or five pages of which the tract was composed spoke of the wickedness of the Papists in trying to enter the Protestant preserves. It entreated the game-keepers (i.e., the bishops and clergy) to be on their guard, and to watch both day and night, so that when the Great Day came there should be a large bag for the rightful proprietor of the preserve. Mrs. Doncaster considered that this tract would be the most suitable she could possibly give to a sportsman. When, therefore, she found she had not a copy left, she wrote to the bookseller at Gipping for a fresh supply, and sent up the parcel of selected tracts by Janet when she went to the Hall to see the pictures. Mrs. Doncaster did not say anything to her about the nature of the package which she undertook to carry to its destination. From the time she was a child she had always shown the greatest antipathy to the serio-comic religious literature of tracts. She and her mother had sometimes become quite angry with each other on the subject. Janet had criticised this very "Papists, Beware," and had laughed at it and abused it before her mother. But she influenced her mother as little as

her mother influenced her in such matters, and Mrs. Doncaster continued to regard the distribution of such literature as one means of following the Apostle's example of being all things to all men.

Janet delivered her parcel to Lady Ann, who instantly saw that the girl was ignorant of its contents. She had her own reasons for not mortifying Janet by letting her know what her mother had sent, and also for not prejudicing the members of her own family against Mrs. Doncaster. She therefore took the parcel into another room, and, after turning over its contents, put them all at the back of the fire. She relied confidently on the fact that Mrs. Leighton would forget they had ever been promised, and also, if Mrs. Doncaster asked her any questions on the subject, that it would be quite easy to make Mrs. Leighton believe she had received the parcel.





CHAPTER VII.

LADY ANN'S SCHEME.



HE travellers had not been many hours in Norborough Hall when Lady Ann called Mr. Forsyth on one side for the purpose of hearing all that he had to say about the journey, and the effect which the year's absence had had on her nephew. Lady Ann motioned to the secretary from the drawing-room window that she would come out and walk round the grounds with him. "If he has anything bad to say, I shall bear it better in the open air, and if his account is good, I shall like the woods all the better for the rest of my life." So she wrapped herself in a thick shawl and joined the young man, who was waiting for her in the garden.

Mr. Forsyth was a young university man who had had a distinguished career as a student. Lady Ann had seen him soon after he took his degree, and she very quickly determined that, whatever it cost, she would get him for Charlie. Circumstances favoured her wishes. Mr. Forsyth was poor and ambitious ; he wanted money, because without it he would have no scope for his ambition. After he had taken his degree, he used to say that he would offer himself for sale to the highest bidder for a few years, if by so doing he might have the rest of his life to do what he liked with. What "he liked" to do with his life was scientific work of an abstruse kind, that was totally unproductive of bread and cheese. He let it be known therefore, that he was on the lookout for work of any kind that would be immediately remunerative. Just at the time he was in this mood, Lady Ann's offer that he should be travelling companion and secretary to Charlie Leighton reached him ; her letter on the subject mentioned that the salary her nephew proposed to offer was 500*l.* a year, and she concluded by asking him to call on her in town the

following day instead of sending her a written reply. Forsyth was sufficiently a man of the world to see that there must be some reason for the offer of so unusually large a salary. If you have a thorough-bred hunter offered you for a ten-pound note, doubts as to his knees, his temper, and his wind immediately suggest themselves to you; by a somewhat similar process of reasoning, Alec Forsyth concluded that when a young gentleman of fortune offers 500*l.* a year to a travelling companion, there must be something wrong with the said young gentleman. From the fact that Lady Ann was carrying on the negotiations, he came to the conclusion that her nephew was probably a lunatic; and even if this proved to be the case, he was prepared to accept the post. He was therefore rather agreeably surprised when he learnt the truth from Lady Ann, and he became travelling secretary to Mr. Leighton without hesitation.

When Lady Ann joined Mr. Forsyth in the garden, she led the way to a pine plantation that spread from the Hall down to the sea shore. This was her favourite walk; she liked the solemn

monotony of the pine trees, and the soft carpet of moss and fir needles that deadened all sounds but the roaring of the sea and the whispering and sighing of the trees.

"And how has Charlie been? Tell me exactly what you think of him," she began.

Mr. Forsyth would have parried with the question if it had been addressed to him by Mrs. Leighton. He had a great tenderness for all weak creatures, and he would have been afraid of hurting her, but he was not afraid of hurting Lady Ann, she seemed so strong and so little in need of pity.

"I cannot give you a very cheerful report," he said. "I don't think that he is any worse than when he left England, but I don't think he is any better. Marston and I for two or three months kept an incessant guard over him, and as long as we did that he was all right. Then I thought it would be well to see if it would be safe to allow him a little freedom. I wanted to see how far it was simple terror of us that kept him sober. I tried giving him a little liberty more than once, but the experiment always failed. He drank furiously

whenever he thought we were out of the way. He has been sober now for six months, and to look at him you would never suspect that he was ever anything else. But my belief is, that he will always require the most incessant surveillance."

If Lady Ann had cried when she heard this, Forsyth would have softened down his recital ; if she had trembled or had asked to lean on his arm he would have understood how his words were stabbing her ; even if she had averted her face from him, he would have known how bitter her grief was. But Lady Ann's features showed no traces of emotion except in becoming sterner than usual. She was silent for some moments after he had ceased speaking. She walked on faster than before, with her head thrown back, and her face showing anger and defiance, rather than grief and tenderness. At last she said, in a harsh voice, "I cannot agree with you in thinking Charlie's case hopeless. I never will believe it is hopeless. If the influences we have brought to bear on him have been insufficient, it doesn't follow that other influences would be insufficient."

"Well, it may be so," he replied. "I shall be very glad if you are right. Very likely I am not the best judge, for I have personally a very strong sense of my own failure; and perhaps it is only self-love makes me think that other people would be as little successful."

"I do not think you have been unsuccessful. You say yourself that—that he has been perfectly sober for six months."

"I don't value success of that kind one iota," he replied. "As long as a thief is in prison he doesn't steal anything, but you don't say that he is reformed till he has proved his honesty when he is at liberty. Leighton is sober as long as Marston and I are watching him; it will be time enough to talk of success when he begins to care about being sober when we are not watching him."

All this was inexpressibly bitter to Lady Ann. Forsyth's rough way of expressing himself jarred upon her; she was offended at the comparison he had made between her nephew and a thief. She was an aristocrat to the backbone, and she thought that a Leighton of Leighton Court, especially one

who was under the special superintendence of the daughter of the late Earl of Comberbatch, was of a superior clay to ordinary mortals. Even though he were a drunkard he should be spoken of with becoming respect. Though she was angry, however, she felt she could not afford to quarrel with Forsyth until she had found some one to take his place. So she replied—

“I have great confidence in establishing temperance as a habit with him ; even though it be, as you say, by means of incessant watching for some years. Then if he had in addition to the force of habit some strong new motive for controlling himself, I believe all would go well.”

“What motive is it possible to bring to bear on him, that does not exist already ? ”

Lady Ann paused ; it was not because a reply was not ready on her lips, but she doubted how far it was prudent to take Mr. Forsyth completely into her confidence. After a moment's hesitation she determined to keep her own counsel, and merely replied, “It is not difficult to suggest a multitude of new motives that might be brought to bear on a

young man in Charlie's position. He might wish to go into Parliament, for instance."

Mr. Forsyth shrugged his shoulders, with the inward comment, "God help this poor realm." If he had known the motive which Lady Ann really hoped to bring to bear on her nephew, he might have taken some stronger means of expressing his dissent ; but he was kept in happy ignorance of the idea that from this time every day grew stronger in the mind of his companion, that marriage would be a sure means of reclaiming her nephew, and that Janet Doncaster was exactly the wife she would choose for him. The more hopeless Forsyth appeared to be of Charlie's future, the more desperately Lady Ann found herself clinging to the notion that there was yet an all-powerful motive that had not yet been brought to bear upon him—the dread of degrading himself in the eyes of a woman he loved. When Lady Ann thought of Janet's clear brave eyes, and the resolute mouth and chin, which had first won her admiration, she decided that she had indeed found the very wife for her nephew ; he would be charmed by her grace

and beauty, she thought, and yet he would hold her in awe and be horribly frightened of losing her good opinion. Of course, she argued, her family and connections are odious and no doubt vulgar, but it would not be difficult to get out of their way, and "poor Charlie's misfortune" rendered it necessary that he should make some sacrifice in his matrimonial alliance. If it had not been for this misfortune Lady Ann would as soon have thought of marrying him to a housemaid as to Miss Doncaster.

"He might have been one of the best matches in Barsetshire," she thought with a sigh; and she gradually made herself believe that it was a piece of rare good luck for Janet that so eligible a *parti* should be brought within the reach of her humble means. "It is the same with everything," she said to herself, looking down on a splendid opal that blazed its reds and greens and purples on her hand. "If this opal had been without a flaw it would have been for the Rothschilds or the Esterhazys; as it is I bought it for fifty guineas, and thanked heaven that it was brought down to the level of my purse."

When Lady Ann was walking with Forsyth on the day of his arrival with her nephew, her plans with regard to Janet were as yet quite vague and unformed. The thought had occurred to her before she ever came to Norborough, that marriage might possibly reclaim Charlie, if everything else failed, and when she saw Janet, and still more when she had talked to her, the idea that the girl would be a good wife for him had flashed upon her ; but it was not till some weeks after his return that this marriage became Lady Ann's predominant and absorbing idea. Now, when she was walking with Forsyth she was startled by being brought almost to the point of mentioning it, she was annoyed with her own want of caution, and resolved that she would see more of Janet before committing herself to anyone on the subject. She was afraid that Forsyth would guess that she was contemplating marriage as a means of bringing new motives for sobriety to bear on her nephew, and she therefore deftly turned the subject to the advantages which Norborough possessed as a place for Charlie. She pointed out a long backwater

where the yacht could lie up for the winter ; she descanted on the number of hares and rabbits which she and Mrs. Leighton always saw in their drives and walks, and the wonderful accounts she had heard of the pheasant and partridge shooting.

“ It is all-important to keep him amused. And here we have the great advantage of having land and water amusements in the same place.”

“ Are there any people here ? ” asked Forsyth, who knew he should get fearfully bored by perpetual yachting and shooting, and hoped that there would occasionally be some one to talk to besides Mrs. Leighton. Forsyth was, when he liked, a very good talker, and if he could get a fairly intelligent listener, talking was a pleasure to him ; it relieved the monotony of his present life.

“ Hardly a creature that we could possibly visit,” she rejoined ; “ the aborigines have begun to call on us, but as yet I have seen no one but one young lady, who is at all presentable.”

“ I hope you are too severe upon the aborigines,” he said.

“ Of course I am,” said Lady Ann, again fearful

of attracting her companion's thoughts where she did not want them to go. "There is a very pleasant clergyman here ; he gives us an elegant trifle of a sermon every Sunday ; he is well-preserved and well-bred ; he knows a little of geology, a little of painting, a little of architecture, and a little of society. He hinted to me when he was showing me his grounds and church, that the natural healthiness of the Norborough climate had preserved his complexion, and that a strict seclusion from Norborough society had preserved his manners from the ravages of time."

Forsyth laughed. "And is the young lady you were speaking of the daughter of this paragon of a parson ?"

"O dear, no ! Mr. Doubleday is not married ; if he had been, he would have vulgarised down to the Norborough level. No ; my pet young lady is a Miss Doncaster, the daughter of a widow. By the way, she is coming here in a day or two to see the pictures, and while she is looking at them you can look at her."

They were getting near the house again. For-

syth was thinking how lightly she had received what he had said about her nephew, and as they walked on in silence Lady Ann gave up her effort to be cheerful and allowed her thoughts to dwell on her absorbing sorrow. Presently she spoke again, and he was startled by the passionate grief expressed in her face and voice. "Mr. Forsyth, his mother mustn't know what you have said to me; it would kill her. It would kill me if I didn't hope through it all. You are wrong, I know you must be wrong, to be so hopeless about him. And yet I sometimes think I should be calm and happy if I saw him dead before me. If I gave up hope, I believe I could kill him with my own hands. Don't try to make me despair again. The very thought maddens me."

"Forgive me, forgive me," cried Forsyth, thinking to himself what a fool he had been, and how he had mistaken her. His words about Charlie had been so many blows, and he now found that, instead of falling on a hard shield of formality and pride, they had wounded a loving and passionate heart. "I was very wrong; I was a brute to say

what I did. I am always rushing at a conclusion, and judging people on insufficient evidence. You are much more likely to be right about him than I am."

Forsyth was quite honest in saying this, for he was thinking to himself, "I was utterly mistaken in her, why not in him?" But, nevertheless, in the matter of Charlie Leighton, Lady Ann was wrong and Forsyth right. The wretched young man was so weak that reform was impossible. The material of his mind was so flimsy that it could not bear mending. The attempt was like putting new cloth into an old garment, the result invariably was that the rent was made worse.

"Help me to believe I am right, then," said Lady Ann as she entered the house, "and help to prove me right, too." The tall, graceful figure swept away, and two seconds afterwards the young man heard Lady Ann's voice in the drawing-room, laughingly give some description to her nephew of her first experiences of the Norborians; whereupon Forsyth made inwardly some very wide generalisations on the character of women. Lady Ann had

left him on the doorstep with her eyes full of tears, and every gesture expressing the strongest emotion ; she crossed the floor of the hall, and the next moment she was entertaining Mrs. Leighton and her son with some ridiculous anecdote ! What fickle, changeable creatures women are !

When Janet arrived with her mother's parcel of tracts, the unpacking and arranging of the pictures had not reached completion. The two young men had succeeded in covering the floor of the hall, the billiard-room, and the study with shavings and papers and wrappers, amongst which were artfully concealed chisels, screwdrivers, pincers, long pieces of wood with sharp nails sticking out of them, that made the place absolutely fatal to the sweeping draperies of Mrs. Leighton and Lady Ann. The billiard-table was partly covered by the disentombed treasures, and when Lady Ann and Janet appeared at the door, Charlie Leighton was leaning with his back against the table, watching Forsyth, who was working away with the enthusiasm of an amateur carpenter at a huge case that obstinately refused to be opened sufficiently to get at its contents. It had

been Forsyth's idea that they should do the unpacking themselves. It would be much more entertaining, he thought, than the yacht, of which he would have more than enough by-and-by. So he persuaded Leighton that no one but themselves would be sufficiently careful in not damaging the pictures in getting them out. Good-natured Mrs. Leighton thought it such a clever original idea of Mr. Forsyth's that he and Charlie should turn carpenters. "It never would have occurred to me, now, if I had thought about it for a hundred years," she said. Charlie at first entered into the work with zeal, but he soon blistered the palms of his hands and took large pieces of skin from his knuckles, and occasionally hammered on his own fingers; he also broke a piece off a frame, and had a narrow escape of putting his chisel through the face of the saint inside the frame. So his part of the work was soon changed to searching for the tools concealed among the *débris*, looking on at Forsyth's exertions, and regretting that he had not written to Christie and Manson to send down two experienced men who would have done the unpack-

ing in less than a quarter of the time it had already taken. He was giving vent to some such expression when Mrs. Leighton, Lady Ann, and Janet appeared at the door.

"Now, Charlie, what have you ready to show us?" said Lady Ann.

"We aren't ready to show anything," he said, "except a crushed finger or two, and some severe wounds on our knuckles."

"Wait a moment," said Forsyth; "I will make a bridge for you to cross from the door to the couches."

He took up some larger bits of wood, and laid them down as a safe path across the floor to the sofas round the room.

Lady Ann and Mrs. Leighton trod daintily along the improvised bridge, but Janet sturdily walked through the rubbish which covered the floor. Her short cloth dress and thick boots were proof against such weapons as lay concealed among the shavings. Having arrived safely at the couches, the two elder ladies declared their intention of staying there; they would have numberless opportunities of ad-

miring the pictures, but the two young men must take Miss Doncaster round the table and show her the pictures that lay there. So Janet was taken round the room by two very efficient showmen, while Lady Ann watched the impression which she made. Janet was very eager about the pictures, and quickly lost all shyness in her interest in them. Forsyth was talking to her of the glories of the Dresden Gallery, and making her talk to him of what had impressed her most in the National Gallery, when Charlie broke in with an account of his sufferings in the course of the unpacking.

"Forsyth insisted that we should do it all ourselves," he said, "and look at the state I'm reduced to ;" and he showed his maimed hands.

"Wasn't it an extraordinary thing for Mr. Forsyth to think of?" asked Mrs. Leighton.

"It wouldn't have seemed extraordinary to me," said Janet, "for at home I do nearly all the carpentering. I think," she said, with a glance at Charlie's hands, "I could open a packing-case with less bloodshed than Mr. Leighton."

"Before I make another attempt I shall appren-

tice myself to Miss Doncaster," said Charlie, with a languid bow.

Forsyth in the meantime had returned to the work he had been engaged in when the ladies came in. He wanted to show Janet a particular picture not yet unpacked, and which he believed was in the case he was opening.

"There's Forsyth at it again," groaned Charlie ; "the fellow is perfectly indefatigable."

"It must be delightful work," said Janet ; "at any rate it is splendidly rewarded."

"As you like it so much, and as you are such a practised hand, do stay and help these two poor over-worked creatures," said Lady Ann.

So Janet stayed for an hour, and did part of the unpacking. Mr. Leighton found her a set of tools, and put himself at her service, while she successfully attacked a big case at the farther corner of the room. Lady Ann was charmed with the success of her manœuvring, and the whole party grew very friendly. Janet was saying good-bye, when Mrs. Leighton said, "How will you get on with the unpacking to-morrow, Mr. Charlie ?"

"We shan't get on at all unless Miss Doncaster comes," he said ; "she ought never to have helped us, unless she meant to see us through with it."

"You ungrateful being," said his aunt. "Do you hear what he says, Miss Doncaster ?"

"Mr. Leighton is laughing at my small attempt at helping," said Janet, who was suddenly uncomfortably conscious of something unusual in Lady Ann's and Mr. Leighton's manner.

Charlie was beginning to protest, when his aunt, seeing the girl's rising colour, came down from her throne and took her arm, and waving a general adieu, sailed down the planks out of the room.

"Good-bye, my dear," said Lady Ann, as she and Janet reached the hall, "and thank you for giving us so pleasant a morning."





CHAPTER VIII.

FRIENDSHIP AND SEA-BREEZES.



ANET hurried down the pine plantation in order to have a run by the sea before she returned home. She was in a mood that was very unusual with her, of restless and vexatious disquiet. She had been quite at her ease with her new friends until the last five minutes; she had even caught herself wondering that she could make friends so quickly, and that great people were so little awful, when her feeling of ease and friendliness had been interrupted by the particular attention which Lady Ann and Mr. Leighton had seemed to bestow on herself. The next moment she was angry with herself for attaching any importance at all to their manner. "It meant nothing at all," she said; "it is only their fine way of being

gracious to an awkward country bumpkin like me." And so at last a run over the shingly beach, and a good blow of sea-air, restored Janet to her usual healthy unconsciousness of self, and when she had reached home she had banished the subject of her uneasiness by persuading herself that there was nothing in Lady Ann's or Mr. Leighton's manner, except the courtesy which really well-bred people show to such of their acquaintances as happen to be of inferior social rank to themselves.

On her mother's drawing-room table, Janet found a letter which would have effectually put the Leightons out of her head, had they not already been blown therefrom by the keen salt breezes. It was from Miss Chesney, to say she was engaged to be married. She wrote very happily ; with a sober, common-sense, strong-hearted joy that was characteristic of herself. " You have often laughed at me," she wrote, " for my desire for new experiences, and now that I have experienced the luxury of loving and being loved, I believe life would only be half life without it. Of course I could go on living if the past month turned out to be a

dream, but I should be just like the people who go on living with one lung, or with some incurable disease." Margaret said very little about her future husband, saying that Janet must know him soon for herself.

"Why she doesn't even say what his name is," said Mrs. Doncaster, in a severe voice.

"Oh yes, mother, she does. See, Robert Williams. And she tells us besides that he's a fellow of St. Philip's College, Cambridge. And," said Janet, reading on, "and what do you think? He's a clergyman. I am surprised; I never should have thought of Margaret marrying a clergyman."

"I am very glad to hear it; very," said Mrs. Doncaster. "I have not been quite easy about her opinions sometimes, Janet, but if she marries a clergyman, no doubt she will settle down to right views on the most important of all subjects."

Janet was not inclined to discuss with her mother why she was surprised at Margaret marrying a clergyman, so she went on reading and giving a résumé to her mother.

"He has taken a college living at Oakhurst, in

the New Forest, and they are to be married at the beginning of December."

And here Janet stopped abruptly, for she was surprised by a strong inclination to cry. Her dear Margaret Chesney would be Margaret Chesney no longer; perhaps Mrs. Robert Williams would be quite a different person. "Oakhurst Rectory" and the "Rev. Robert Williams" seemed very incongruous names to connect with that of her friend. She went away feeling quite unable to respond to her mother's congratulatory ejaculations on Miss Chesney's remarkably good fortune.

"Being a governess, I have no doubt she would have been thankful to marry into a much inferior position than Mr. Williams', so I don't wonder at her writing in good spirits," said Mrs. Doncaster.

Janet felt that this, in her present temper, was unbearable, so she went away and tried to write a letter to her friend, wishing her joy. It was rather hard work to write one that did not sound coldly doubtful of the good qualities of the Rev. Robert Williams. But at last Janet succeeded in putting herself sufficiently into sympathy with her friend to

write her a letter that did not show any want of warmth.

It was not long before Janet learnt more of Miss Chesney's future husband. Lady Ann called at Mrs. Doncaster's, ostensibly to ask some question about the infant school, but in reality to arrange that Janet should come up to the Hall again. Mrs. Doncaster was still full of Miss Chesney's engagement, and she told Lady Ann that Janet had had a letter the day before yesterday from her friend Miss Chesney, to say she was engaged to be married to the Rev Robert Williams, tutor of St. Philip's College, Cambridge; whereupon Lady Ann remarked that St. Philip's was Mr. Forsyth's college, and she had no doubt he had been one of Mr. Williams' pupils. Would Miss Doncaster join them in a little yachting expedition? Charlie had arranged to take his mother and herself out in the yacht to-morrow, and if Miss Doncaster would make one of the party everyone would be charmed, and then she could hear all that Mr. Forsyth had to tell about his old tutor, who was to marry her friend. So it was arranged that Janet should be called for on the next

morning, and taken for a day's sail in the *Fair Helen*. Janet was nothing loth to join the party; she was passionately fond of the sea. Lady Ann's gracious petting was very pleasant. She would be very glad to hear about Mr. Williams, and she would have a further opportunity of proving that Mr. Leighton's manners were only of the proper Vere de Vere stamp, and that they meant nothing special to herself. Janet's life at home had been very monotonous and narrow, she had never had much outlet for her healthy young enjoyment of all kinds of pleasures, and what seemed to her the rose-coloured brightness of the life of the Leightons was a very pleasant contrast to the grey routine of her own existence.

She had a very happy day on board the *Fair Helen*. To begin with, Forsyth gave an account of Mr. Williams that set her quite at ease about Miss Chesney's marriage.

"He is the very best fellow in the world," said Forsyth. "One gets to know a man wonderfully well in college, and I don't think there's a single man in Phip's who wouldn't say that Williams is a

first-rate fellow. I never knew a man so thoroughly believed in."

"I am very glad, for Miss Chesney is quite the best woman in the world, and when I heard she was going to be married to a college tutor I was rather dismayed."

"There's a general opinion in the outside world," laughed Forsyth, "that a college tutor is an aged and slightly mouldy individual, who bears a striking resemblance to Pharaoh's lean kine, for he is supposed to consume no end of good dinners and several bottles of '20 port daily, and still to remain a perfectly dried-up and corpse-like creature, quite ready to be put underground without taking any further steps in the direction of dying."

"I don't know that I had pictured Mr. Williams to myself quite as bad as that," said Janet, smiling; "but aren't college tutors and dons very frowsy old creatures? I had always imagined them as belonging to a different order of beings from the general outside world; as intensely conservative, for instance, not in politics merely, but about everything. My idea of a college tutor is that he should

be a Jacobite in politics and pray for King Charles the Martyr ; that he should drink no wine but port, eat no meat that doesn't come off a joint weighing four-and-twenty pounds, that he should reckon money by guineas, travel in a stage-coach instead of by railway, tolerate women and children as disagreeable necessities, and have a lingering affection for the 'Old Style' calendar."

Forsyth laughed. "Where did you get your picture from?" he said. "It really isn't so very unlike some old fellows that still remain up at Cambridge. But the race is rapidly becoming extinct, and fellows of colleges are now very much like other people so far as their experience of what is going on in the world is concerned, and if there is any difference, I think they have rather fewer prejudices than the run of people. You were speaking of politics; the most thoroughgoing Radicals I know are fellows of colleges. Mr. Williams is not exactly a Radical, but he's a Liberal."

"That's another satisfactory point about him, for Miss Chesney has a natural predilection for innovations of all kinds, and I don't think she would

have got on at all with the old Jacobite type of don."

Janet liked Forsyth, and he contributed very much to the enjoyment of her day. Mr. Leighton was still rather oppressively polite. He insisted on helping Janet in and out of the small boat that brought the ladies to the yacht as if she had been a cripple. When she tried to use the telescope he effectually prevented her seeing anything through it by steadying the end of it with his hand instead of letting her adjust it for herself. When she walked up the deck he sprang forward to remove a piece of rope that she might quite easily have stepped over. He referred to her skill at carpentering with a languishing air, and said that the box she had unfastened was indeed highly favoured above all the other packages which had been left to the rough handling of Forsyth and himself. Janet was unused to having nonsense of this kind talked to her, and as it is quite an acquired taste she didn't like it, and was very grateful to Forsyth for breaking in with—

"My dear fellow, your handling was not very

rough to anything except your own fingers ; I wish it had been, then we should have got on faster. Miss Doncaster was a great deal rougher than you were ; the existence of the box she unfastened is over as a packing-case ; its next sphere of usefulness will be as firewood."

Here Lady Ann called to Forsyth to come and decide where they should have lunch, and Janet was left to defend herself from Mr. Leighton's compliments as best she could. So she made him talk about Leighton Court, a subject into which she thought he could hardly introduce anything personal to herself. But she was mistaken, for he soon got upon the subject of hunting, Leighton Court being in a good hunting district ; from hunting he got to riding, and then to the question, " Did Janet ride ? "

" Never anything but a donkey," said Janet.

" You ought to ride ; you ought really ; now indeed you ought. It would exactly suit you. You would ride well at once. Some people never can ride ; my mother never could, but my aunt, now, is a splendid rider. You can see she would

be from the look of her, and it's just the same with you ! ”

“ I will try, then, some day, to see if your opinion is right,” said Janet, not wishing to dispute the point, and wishing very much that he would not look at her in a way that made her conscious she was being looked at.

“ Why not try to-morrow ? ” he persisted ; “ Lady Ann will be charmed to have a companion.”

“ I am very much obliged to you, but it is quite impossible, thank you,” said Janet, moving towards the others, who were arranging lunch on the deck.

“ What is impossible ? ” said Mrs. Leighton, who was cutting up cake enough to feed a regiment of schoolboys.

“ It will be quite impossible to eat all that cake, my love,” said Lady Ann, benignly. She had taken in the situation at a glance, and saw that Janet did not wish to be pressed to say what she declined as an impossibility. So she chose to take Mrs. Leighton's question as if it had been an abstract metaphysical enquiry. “ Things are going

on very well," she said to herself, " but Charlie is too *empresé*. The girl gets quite embarrassed."

It was a great relief to Janet to get away from Mr. Leighton's superfluity of politeness, and Lady Ann took care to protect her from it for the rest of the day by monopolising her nephew, and so leaving Janet to Mrs. Leighton and Forsyth. With the latter Janet had already established very friendly relations. One thing that she specially liked in him was that he seemed to talk to her as if he were oblivious of the fact that he was a man and she was a woman ; he talked his best, and of the things that he cared most for. He left her to take care of herself and to do things for herself, and did not act on the assumption that she was in need of perpetual assistance to do things which every woman not a cripple must constantly do for herself. He did not fetch her chairs, or open the door for her, or carry her umbrella. He did these things for other women because they seemed to expect it, but from the first there was a tacit mutual understanding between them that these forms and ceremonies were tiresome to her. At the same time,

if she had required a real service, there was no one whom she would sooner have asked to do it than Forsyth. There was a genuine *camaraderie* between them that was very pleasant to them both. She liked to observe the difference of his manner towards herself and the other ladies. He assisted them down into the little boat in which the party left the yacht as if they had been packages marked. "Glass, with care;" he let Janet get down by herself, and handing her an oar, said, in a matter of course way, "Will you row? Leighton and the men are coming in the other boat."

When Janet reached home she found her mother in bad spirits, and she blamed herself for staying away from her all day. She tried to amuse her by describing her companions, and her reasons for not liking Mr. Leighton so well as his secretary.

"He is so fearfully polite, mother dear, he is quite fatiguing. I do believe if he saw a pin on the ground he would dart down upon it and say, 'Pray allow me to remove that piece of metal out of your way;' or he would, at any rate, offer you his hand to help you to get over it."

Mrs. Doncaster smiled faintly. "My dear child, how you exaggerate!" she said, stroking Janet's hair fondly.

"Well, mother, you cannot think how exasperating it is, when you are so strong and well that you feel inclined to shout for the mere pleasure of being alive, to have the people about you assuming that you can hardly lift your hand to your head."

Janet was sitting on a low stool at her mother's feet, and she did not see Mrs. Doncaster's eyes fill with tears. "To shout for the mere pleasure of being alive" had never suggested itself to Mrs. Doncaster, but now she was beginning to be oppressed with a constant uneasiness about her own health. She tried to persuade herself that the languor and faintness against which she was struggling were the result of the anxiety she had gone through in regard to her pecuniary prospects. When Janet was with her she always tried not to show any signs of ill-health, but when she was alone she brooded over her symptoms and threw herself into a fever of grief, terror, and excitement, by picturing to her-

self what would be Janet's condition in the event of her own death. This day, when Janet had been on the Leightons' yacht, Mrs. Doncaster's mind had been filled with these gloomy forebodings ; her uneasiness had gradually changed into a settled depression, and a fixed conviction that her end was near. Still she had intended not to say a word to Janet of her fears. She thought she could bear her sorrow alone ; she would take an opportunity, when Janet was away, to see Mr. Grey, or perhaps to consult a physician at Gipping or in London. Then, when her anxiety was changed to certainty, it would be time enough to tell Janet. When Janet returned home blooming with health and vigour, Mrs. Doncaster was oppressed by a vague sense of the want of sympathy between them. This feeling was increased by Janet's attempt to cheer her mother by giving an account of her day's enjoyment, and it was still further strengthened when Janet spoke laughingly of the mere pleasure of being alive. " Her life is not my life," Mrs. Doncaster thought ; " my sorrow does not even cast a cloud on her enjoyments." And with the thought her eyes filled

with tears. She did not blame Janet ; she was too just a woman for that ; she knew she had chosen to keep her sorrows to herself. But none the less she felt in that hour of pain the bitterness of isolation. Janet, all unconscious of what was taking place, laughed lightly to herself at the remembrance of some specially ridiculous example of what she had nicknamed Mr. Leighton's "Vere de Vere manners," when she was startled by her mother bursting into a passion of weeping. In a moment Janet's arms were round her, and Janet's voice was soothing her.

"Dearest mother, what is it?" she asked.

"Have I done anything to grieve you?"

"No, no," sobbed Mrs. Doncaster.

Janet made her lie on the sofa, and bathed her brows, which were hot and feverish. She was seriously alarmed, for her mother was usually so calm and self-contained. When she was quieter, Janet said very gently, "Mother, you must tell me what has distressed you so."

"I am ill," said Mrs. Doncaster ; "that is, I mean I am not well, and I have been very anxious, dear—anxious about you."

"You are ill?" said Janet. "And I never found it out? Oh, mother, why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't tell you because I thought at first that I was only unwell from anxiety."

"But why did you bear it all alone? Why didn't you tell me?"

Janet caressed her mother with her hand as she was speaking, but she felt with a tinge of bitterness some of the dreary sense of isolation under which Mrs. Doncaster had at last broken down.

"I have had many causes for anxiety, Janet, which I thought you were too young to be troubled with. But there is one on which I know I ought to have spoken to you more frequently than I have."

Then Mrs. Doncaster spoke to Janet about her religious condition in words which need not be repeated here. The poor girl was wretched; she could not say anything to comfort her mother on this point without lying and feeling that she was a hypocrite. She tried to say something about the impossibility of all thinking alike; that she would try to do what was right. But Mrs. Doncaster burst in with an entreaty that she would not listen

to the sophistry of the world, or trust to the filthy rags of her own righteousness. At last Janet ventured to say, "You say that you had many causes for anxiety, mother? Perhaps the others are—— Perhaps I could help you to bear the others."

Then Mrs. Doncaster told Janet of the nature of her grandfather's settlement, and the great anxiety she had suffered in the summer in consequence, and how intensified this anxiety was by her growing fears about her own health. Janet listened with amazement. She saw that she ought to begin preparing herself at once to earn her own living, but she did not say a word of this, for she knew how strongly her mother would oppose the idea, and Janet dreaded to add one iota to the present burden. She was, however, able, with the usual hopefulness of youth, to persuade herself that her mother's fears with regard to her own health were quite ill-founded. "It is the result of over-anxiety, and the strain of keeping it secret," she thought; and she endeavoured with partial success to persuade Mrs. Doncaster that this was the case. In

order to make quite sure, however, that there was no real cause for alarm, Janet said that they would send for Mr. Grey the next day. Mrs. Doncaster was astonished to find how much lighter her trials were after she had spoken of them, and as the result of communicativeness had been so consolatory, she ventured to say a word as to her hope that Janet would marry.

“If I could live to see you happily married, dear, I should be quite easy. I do not fear death, but I do fear leaving you alone.”

“You shall not leave me at all, mammy. I will not let you have such dismal thoughts.”

“I am not so sorrowful now, but I am still anxious. And remember, Janet, that it is my dearest wish—my dearest earthly wish—to see you married.”

Janet made no answer. Two months ago she would have replied that there was no one to marry, but she could not say this now without risking a retort from her mother that it was no longer true since the arrival of the new tenants at the Hall; and this observation would have been,

she scarcely knew why, exquisitely disagreeable. So she broke off the conversation by getting up to do the bolting and locking-up of windows and doors, of which ladies who live alone generally make so important a business. Janet was up early the next morning, and she ran round at once to Mr. Grey to ask him to come in and see her mother. She wanted to see him alone and without Mrs. Doncaster's knowledge, in order that she might give him her view of the case.

"She has had a good many anxieties this summer," she said, "which until yesterday she kept to herself, and the strain has unnerved her, and has made her have all kinds of fears about her health, which I feel almost sure you will say are only fancies."

"Ah, yes, just so, Miss Doncaster," said Mr. Grey, who always agreed with everybody. "And the weather has been trying, exceedingly trying, you know. I really felt quite low and out of spirits myself last week. I will drop in and see your mamma, and I have no doubt a little mixture that I shall send her will set her quite right again."

So at twelve o'clock Mr. Grey dropped in, felt Mrs. Doncaster's pulse, looked at her tongue, and asked her a question or two. "Appetite good. Ah, no, not very good. Just so. Really, in this weather no one's appetite is good. I will send you a little dose which will act upon the appetite. I take it myself sometimes when I am not quite up to the mark."

Janet followed him out of the room to hear what he had to say. "Nervous depression, my dear Miss Doncaster. Just so. No doubt whatever about it." And off he trotted, leaving Janet quite convinced that she had been right.






CHAPTER IX.

FORSYTH.

"Saving a crown, he had nothing else beside."

OME weeks passed by after Mr. Grey's first visit, during which both mother and daughter had no reason to doubt the favourable view which he took of his patient. The medicine of happiness, and the breaking-down of her habitual reserve towards her daughter, were for a time efficacious in restoring Mrs. Doncaster to her usual health. In the meantime Janet's fears for her mother were almost completely forgotten ; she had never before been so happy at home. The coldness and isolation of her life with her mother had disappeared, and there was a great growth of mutual tenderness and confidence between them.

Her friends at the Hall at the same time contrib-

uted very much to her enjoyment. Lady Ann had said a word to her nephew which prevented his attentions assuming the exaggerated form which had been disagreeable to Janet. Under Lady Ann's influence he firmly believed himself to be in love, and although he was rather diffident, she encouraged him to think that his love was returned. As for Janet, she liked Mr. Leighton much better than when first she knew him, and probably she thought she liked him better than she really did out of contrition for having almost disliked him, unjustly, as she now thought, when first they met. Lady Ann was always ready with some well-chosen praise of her nephew in Janet's presence, and poor Mrs. Leighton unconsciously took up her sister-in-law's cue, and saw everything Charlie did through rose-coloured spectacles. One day when they were alone, Lady Ann saw fit to take the good-natured little woman into her confidence. Mrs. Leighton had just been saying what a comfort dear Charlie was to them, how good he was. "Do you know," she said, "I think he will be quite a pattern country gentleman? I was so

pleased when he offered to build a new room for the infant school that Mrs. Doncaster is so much interested in."

"I was very pleased too. But, Emmy, I was glad not only because Charlie knew what was expected of him as the Lord Bountiful of the parish, but because the school is the one that Janet Doncaster was talking to us about."

Mrs. Leighton looked profoundly mystified. So Lady Ann went on. Suddenly coming across the room and taking her sister's hand—

"Emily," she said, in a deep solemn voice, "I believe all our trouble about Charlie is over, and that we have to thank Janet Doncaster for it."

Mrs. Leighton still did not see what Lady Ann meant, but she was profoundly impressed by her manner, and prepared to receive whatever she was told with simple reverence. "Charlie is in love with her," Lady Ann went on, "and I am quite sure that if she accepts him, and there can be no doubt that she will, he will have such a powerful motive for self-control that drink will cease even to be a temptation to him."

Mrs. Leighton could only say, "Oh, Ann! dear Ann!" and cry.

"Directly I saw her," said Lady Ann, "I said to myself, If ever Charlie marries, there's his wife."

"Dear, dear, and it's such a surprise to me. I never should have thought of such a thing," murmured the other lady. And presently she added, with the consciousness that she was saying something very daring indeed—"If you hadn't told me this with your own lips, Ann, I could never have believed it. I always have liked Miss Doncaster very much indeed, very much. But I thought you would expect Charlie to marry some one in our own sphere, as it were, you know."

"So I should, most certainly," said Lady Ann, with a touch of reproof in her voice, "if things had been different. But as it is, we must make some sacrifice, and as matters stand the marriage will be an excellent thing for Charlie, and a *most extraordinary* piece of good fortune for her. She might have lived in this place a hundred years without even speaking to a man in Charlie's position."

"Oh, yes; she, of course, will be most lucky,"

acquiesced Mrs. Leighton. "Will they be married at once? And shall you tell her, Ann? About Charlie, you know?" The last words were almost in a whisper.

"Well, dear, he hasn't even asked her yet, so mind, you must be very careful and not let out the secret, or show either of them that you have the least suspicion of what I have told you. And with regard to telling her, of course I should not think of doing so until after they were engaged; it would not be just to Charlie, to prejudice her in any way against him." And after they are engaged, I am not quite decided whether I ought to tell her or not. It must depend on circumstances. I should like best not to tell her. That would strengthen Charlie's motives for self-restraint, for if she knew nothing he would always hope that she never would know. Whereas if she were told, this motive would be gone. On the other hand, there is some risk in not telling her; she might ignorantly lead him into temptation."

Lady Ann was talking more to herself than to her sister-in-law, who said feebly—

"You will do whatever is best, I am sure."

"Yes," said Lady Ann, still partially oblivious of her sister's existence, "there will be plenty of time to decide after they are engaged."

When things were going so very much as she desired, Lady Ann was exceedingly annoyed at an unexpected obstacle which threatened to spoil all her plans. She had always noticed that Janet and Forsyth were very good friends, but now she began to fear that he showed signs of falling in love, and she did not at all wish her nephew to have a rival. She had almost determined to make some excuse for sending Forsyth away, when he himself relieved her of further anxiety by telling her that he had the offer of a lectureship in his college which he wished to accept, and he must therefore ask Mr. Leighton to look out for another secretary. Her keen eyes searched his face as he was speaking. "Has this sudden determination to leave anything to do with Janet Doncaster?" she thought. "Is it possible that he has actually made her an offer and been refused?" But she merely said what the occasion required; speaking of the regret with

which they all should part with him, and of the hopes they entertained for his future prosperity. Rather, it must be confessed, to his surprise, she made no effort to retain his services, but suggested that perhaps it might be convenient to him to leave at once; he would have his rooms to get ready, he might wish to have a little rest before beginning his new work and he would probably wish to spend Christmas with his friends. As it was then November, and his lectures in college would not begin till February, there was no necessity, on the ground of time, for his leaving at once, but he nevertheless accepted Lady Ann's suggestion that he should do so. He had his own reasons for wishing to leave, and the sooner the better, he thought. He accordingly replied that if it was not inconvenient he would leave Norborough in about a fortnight or three weeks. Lady Ann was burning to know whether Janet had anything to do with this abrupt departure, but she dared not even approach the subject with Forsyth. She ordered the pony carriage, and drove into Norborough. She would call at Mrs. Doncaster's and find

out whether her plans had received any serious damage.

After talking generalities for a quarter of an hour, she said, "You will be surprised, Mrs. Doncaster, to hear that we are to lose Mr. Forsyth. He has had some college appointment offered him, a professorship or something of the kind, and he is to leave us almost directly."

Lady Ann was relieved to see that Janet was not in the least agitated by the news, and "she could not possibly have known that he was going to leave so soon," she reflected.

Mrs. Doncaster said something about the inconvenience to Mr. Leighton of losing his secretary so suddenly ; and Janet gratified Lady Ann by saying frankly—

"I am very sorry he is going away. Why is he leaving in such a hurry?"

"Well, my dear, he is very anxious to spend some time with his friends, and I am almost sure, though he has never told me so, that there's a young lady in the case!"

Lady Ann congratulated herself very much on

this speech. It was strictly true, to the letter ; and it answered all the purposes of a lie. When her father had been Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, in the House of Commons, he had had a way of answering inconvenient questions which combined all the advantages of truth and falsehood, and Lady Ann sometimes felt that his mantle had fallen on her. Janet's manner convinced her that "no harm had been done," and after a few farewell common-places, she drove home with a light heart.

But though Janet was heart-whole, yet it was nevertheless true that she was "the young lady in the case," and that Forsyth would not have left Norborough but for her. Not that he was seriously in love, but he felt himself more attracted by Janet than he ever had been by any other woman ; he liked being with her, he liked watching her kindling, expressive eyes, and hearing her clear voice and merry laugh. He found that he almost unconsciously associated the thought of her with all his occupations and pleasures. If he had a book that he particularly liked, he put it aside to lend it to her ; if he noticed anything in Charlie Leighton's pic-

tures which had escaped his attention before, he wondered if she had observed it, and resolved to point it out to her on the next opportunity ; if the sunset sky was more than ordinarily brilliant, he hoped she was watching it ; and so the thought of her gradually pervaded all his daily life. It is true that he protested to himself that he was not in love, but at last he could not hide from himself the fact that he soon would be, unless he went away from Norborough. When he once recognised this, his decision to leave was taken. He wrote to his old tutor, saying he would be glad to take college work next term if there was a vacancy, and we have seen that Lady Ann facilitated his departure. Forsyth had no money and no profession ; marriage, therefore, was out of the question. Running away was consequently the only course left open to him, and having resolved to go he was glad to be able to do so without delay.

Although Lady Ann was fully satisfied that Janet had never even thought of Forsyth as a possible lover, yet the temporary alarm she had felt on the subject made her very desirous to push

matters on, and get her scheme carried out before there was a chance of any further obstacles presenting themselves. She had heard some talk of Janet going to London with her mother; it was very desirable that the engagement should be settled before she left. Lady Ann thought with alarm how fresh and unaffected Janet would look, compared with London young ladies, and that she might get engaged and as good as married during a three weeks' stay in town. She determined to speak to Charlie on the subject, and with characteristic energy went off to find him at once. She found him in the gun-room with Marston. Making some excuse for sending the man away, she began at once, "Charlie, I want to say a word to you about Miss Doncaster." Then, laying her hand on his shoulder, she continued, "My dear boy, I expect you think your aunt is an inquisitive old busybody. But I hear that Mrs. Doncaster has been unwell for some time, and that Janet is going to take her to London in a few days to consult a physician; and if he gives a favourable report, they are going to stay on in London, so that Janet may

go to a wedding of a friend of hers. Now I want her to go as your *fiancée*, so that other people who might take a fancy to her may be warned off. She is so remarkably attractive that she would have any number of offers if she were in the way of seeing people, and I know very well, although you have tried to hide it from us all, that your happiness is bound up in her. You would be broken-hearted if she formed any other attachment, and I want my boy to be first in the field."

Mr. Leighton firmly believed all that his aunt said about his devotion to Janet. As she had told him about twice a week for the last month that, notwithstanding all his efforts to appear indifferent, it was as clear to her as the sun at noonday that he was passionately attached to Janet, he really believed that he would be seriously unhappy if she married any one else. He had been prepared to make her an offer any day for the last three weeks, but never yet had found an opportunity to do so. Whenever he was getting very sentimental, Janet always found something to laugh at, and so prevented him from coming to the point. Now, when

his aunt urged him to speak to her at once before going to London, he thought there was no necessity to be in such a hurry ; he had a nervous dread of encountering Janet's clear, merry eyes. If he had known any nursery rhymes he would have felt that the situation he dreaded was the one depicted in these lines—

My love, I'm all on fire,
And I'm afraid I shall expire
If you do not come to me, my

Love, love, love !

And the lady replies—

Will your flames assist a little
To boil water in the kettle
That some breakfast I may chance for to

Taste, taste, taste ?

"I'm afraid she doesn't care enough for me yet," he said, in reply to Lady Ann.

"I'm sure she does ; I am perfectly certain of it."

"Then there can be no fear that she'd accept any one else," he replied, feeling that he had really said something very much to the point.

"Oh, my dear Charlie, you don't know what

girls are. Suppose she goes away from here, and that she meets some one, at this wedding, for instance, who pays her great attention, and who makes her an offer. She would of course feel, 'if Mr. Leighton really cared for me as much as he pretended to do, he would have made me an offer before I left home; he can't have any real feeling for me.' And she would accept the other man; and I could hardly blame her if she did."

"But do you think that to the majority of people she would be so very attractive? My taste is rather uncommon, you know."

"Oh, she is most fascinating. What attracts you in her is not, no doubt, what attracts most people, but I never saw a girl more generally pleasing. Forsyth, now, is head over heels in love with her!"

"Forsyth?" repeated Charlie, much surprised.

"Yes," said Lady Ann, "and I'm very glad he is going away, or he might have given us a good deal of trouble, I'm sure."

"'Pon my word, you astonish me!"

"Take my advice, Charlie. Don't let the grass

grow under your feet, or your happiness may be blighted for ever. See her to-day."

He put on a languishing air, as becomes a potentially blighted being, and resolved he would take his aunt's advice.

Half-an-hour later he was being driven down to Mrs. Doncaster's. He never walked anywhere. But in answer to his enquiry for Miss Doncaster, he received the reply that Mrs. Doncaster was very unwell, and that Miss Doncaster was with her mother, and she begged Mr. Leighton would excuse her not coming down.

His courage was so high that he desired the servant to ask Miss Doncaster what hour on the following day he could have the pleasure of seeing her if he called. The woman recognised that the gentleman was "a-courting," and she therefore replied, in a tone of the deepest commiseration, "Why that *is* a pity now, that that is. Why, Miss Janet is all riddy to go to London with her ma the first train to-morrow, sir." Mr. Leighton was turning away from the door with an air of deep dejection, when she called him back.

"This is where they're a-goin' to, sir." And she read from a direction that lay on the table in the little hall, "15, Brown Street, Lancaster Square, London." He took down the direction, and flung himself into the carriage again.

"Where to, sir?" said Marston, who always sat beside the coachman when Mr. Leighton drove out.

"Home," said Charlie; and Marston and the coachman formed their own opinions also on the subject of courting.

Lady Ann was very disappointed at the result of the journey; she had been especially anxious that the engagement should be settled before Janet went to London.

"They are going quite ten days before they said they would," she said, in an aggrieved tone.

But her nephew was not altogether sorry that the departure of the Doncasters gave him an excuse for making his declaration in writing and not in person. He suggested this course to Lady Ann. She was full of impatience at the thought, for she knew how much easier it is to refuse an

offer if it comes by the post than if it is pressed by the lover in person. But at last she acquiesced. "For after all," she thought, "what motive can the girl possibly have for refusing him; she must know that it is an extraordinary piece of good fortune for her."

The letter did not get itself written that day. It was agreed between Lady Ann and Charlie that to-morrow would be soon enough, as he had Janet's London address. She would very much have liked, if not to have dictated the letter, at least to have seen it; but she was afraid to risk the slightest irritation on her nephew's part, and she contented herself by writing a supplement to the letter herself, and driving over with it to the nearest post-town to ensure Janet's receiving it in London by the second delivery of country letters.





CHAPTER X.

WAITING FOR THE VERDICT.



ADY ANN was right when she said that the Doncasters were going to London ten days earlier than they had intended. Their journey was hastened by the state of Mrs. Doncaster's health. She had intended to consult a physician when she went to London, but she had not thought it necessary to take a journey to town solely for that purpose. When Janet went up for Miss Chesney's wedding would be quite soon enough. But now her comparative tranquility on the subject of her health was suddenly changed into the most anxious and restless disquiet. She had several attacks of faintness which the ordinary remedies were powerless to

remove. Mr. Grey began to get less cheerfully acquiescent than usual ; and, though he continued to say, " No doubt of it," to every suggestion that Mrs. Doncaster was the victim of the weather, or that she would be quite well if she could have a change, or that she was suffering from nervous depression, yet his manner conveyed, both to Mrs. Doncaster and Janet, that he was getting anxious about his patient. At last, one day, when he found Mrs. Doncaster lying on the sofa, more feeble and prostrate than he had seen her before, he motioned to Janet that he would speak to her before he left.

" My dear young lady," he said, " you were saying the other day that you were going with your mamma to London shortly ? "

" Yes," she replied, " but if you think mamma too poorly to undertake the journey, of course we shouldn't think of going."

" Ah, yes, just so, just so ; no doubt of it. But I think that Mrs. Doncaster would not find the journey so trying now as she would in a fortnight's time."

The colour forsook Janet's lips. She looked up at him, unable for a moment to speak.

"Do you mean—" she whispered, unable to get any further.

"The fact is, my dear, that I ought to prepare you for the possibility of a very sad event. But I should like your mamma to see Dr. Bird, and, unless I am very much mistaken, she will not be able to go up to town unless she goes at once."

Poor Janet was white and trembling, as the doctor went on kindly: "You must bear up, my dear; especially before your mamma. It is most important that she should not be in the slightest degree excited. You must not tell her what I have told you. Simply say that I wish for another opinion, and that there is no reason why you should put off going to London.

"Oh, she will guess directly what the reason is," said Janet, turning her sorrowful, appealing eyes towards him.

"Yes, yes, just so. Well, you are clever enough to find some excuse that will prevent her from being alarmed about herself. The reason why it is

so very desirable to keep her quiet is that, in my opinion, she is suffering from heart disease, and any over-excitement might prove fatal."

"Perhaps she ought not to undertake the journey at all?"

"Oh, it will do her good, no doubt of it, if you manage to avoid agitating her." Janet looked doubtful, so he went on: "Possibly Dr. Bird might not confirm my opinion. You know we country practitioners are thought very little of in London."

"Thank you," sobbed Janet, who had now fairly broken down. "I will take her as soon as I can."

"To-morrow, or the next day?" he asked.

"I think we could get off by the day after to-morrow," she said.

"That's right; good-bye, my dear. Let Mrs. Grey know if there is anything she can do for you. She would come in at any moment, you know. Just so; not a doubt of it. Good-bye."

When Janet was left alone she seemed to have no sense of anything but of death and desolation. She could not think at first, she could only feel, in

a stupid, half-stunned way, the dreary consciousness of an inevitable and everlasting separation from one who had made a chief part of her life. And then she began to think, "I have not been half good enough to her. I have been selfish, and have never given up my life for hers, as she would have given hers to me. She has been very lonely—poor mother—and I haven't been what she wished me to be." And she made many resolves for the future, how, if her mother was spared to her, she would be more childlike and gentle, and would try to bridge over the differences that separated them from each other.

When she returned she found her mother sleeping; and she gazed with newly-awakened eyes, and with an aching heart, at those dear features that she soon would see no more. She thought, with a strong passion of regret, how much more they ought to have been to each other all those long years that they had lived together; and again she resolved that the future should be different to the past, if only her mother remained with her. When Mrs. Doncaster awoke she was calm

and placid, and Janet took the opportunity of broaching the subject of the journey to London. To her surprise and great relief, her mother fell in with her suggestion that they should go to town at once, without appearance of alarm or agitation.

"I don't think Mr. Grey is doing you much good, mother," Janet said. "I wish you could see Dr. Bird without waiting till we had thought of going to London. Couldn't we go sooner? Mr. Grey has no objection."

"We will go sooner if you like, dear," said her mother; "then I could see Dr. Bird, and get that well over before the wedding."

"Is there any reason why we should not go almost at once? I should see more of Margaret if we did," said poor Janet, feeling very hypocritical.

"At once?"

"Yes; on Thursday or Friday."

"Thursday is the day after to-morrow. If we go as soon as that, there is no reason why we shouldn't go to-morrow; half-an-hour will do all our packing."

"We will say to-morrow, if you like, mother. I know we can go to the boarding-house in Brown Street that Margaret told us of."

Although Mrs. Doncaster was tranquil, she was not ignorant of the real reason for going to London without delay. She knew that she was much worse, and she had noticed Mr. Grey's anxiety. She now had no doubt that he had suggested to Janet that they should see Dr. Bird at once. She offered no opposition to the plan, for she felt her present suspense was almost more than she could bear. She would insist on hearing the whole truth from the London physician, and she began almost to count the hours till she should see him. "Will it be life or death?" she said constantly to herself. She was not excited, as she had been when first she told Janet of her fears; she lay very still on her sofa all day, scarcely speaking at all, not reading nor wishing to be read to. At night she did not sleep, but kept on thinking, "Will it be life or death? Will it be life or death? Before forty-eight hours are over I shall know." When Janet came to her early in the morning, she saw from her

weary eyes, and the anxious lines on her face, that her mother had not slept.

"No, dear, I didn't sleep," she said. "I've been thinking."

"We ought not to go to-day," said Janet; "you are not fit for the journey."

"Not go to-day?" said her mother, in quick, impatient tones. "I say we must go to-day." And then, in a gentler voice, and with a trembling lip, "I can't bear waiting any longer."

Then Janet knew what had filled her mother's mind the day before, and she understood the reason of her ready acquiescence in the immediate departure for London. "Dear mother," she whispered, and they clasped each other with tears.

The journey was safely accomplished, and it was arranged that Mrs. Doncaster should be at Dr. Bird's the following morning at twelve o'clock. Janet, after giving her mother her breakfast in her own room, came down for her own, in a dingy London dining-room, which seemed full of yellow fog. On the table she was surprised to find a let-

ter addressed to herself. The reader knows the author of it. It ran as follows :—

“Norborough Hall, Dec. 7, 186—.

“MY DEAR MISS DONCASTER,

“As I could not have the pleasure of seeing you yesterday when I called, I venture to write to you on a matter of very great importance ; a matter, in fact, in which the whole of my future happiness is concerned. Dear Miss Doncaster, if I say I love you, it will not convey to you half the emotion that I feel when I pen the words. For the last month the thought of you has been always before me. My usual amusements no longer occupy me. I haven't fired a gun for a fortnight ; I only care for the yacht and for the pictures because they remind me of you. If you are able to return my affection, I shall be, indeed, the happiest of men. For God's sake, don't say ‘No ;’ for if you do, I shall never be able to endure the sight of Norborough again. If you consent to be my wife, you will find that my only wish is to lie at your feet

and do all that you wish. A dog is not more devoted to his master than I shall be to you.

“ Write at once, for I can neither eat nor sleep from anxiety.

“ Believe me, my dear Miss Doncaster,

“ Ever your most devoted and affectionate,

“ CHARLES R. G. L. LEIGHTON.

“ P.S.—I trust this is the last time I shall ever call you anything but Janet.”

Notwithstanding her anxiety for her mother, Janet could not help smiling at some parts of this letter. Some of her old half-contemptuous feeling for Mr. Leighton revived. “ Lie at your feet and do all that you wish,” she repeated. “ He might know by this time that of all things in the world, that is what I should most hate him or anyone to do.” Her first impulse was to write a reply at once :—“ It is quite impossible. Pray don’t think of it any more.” Then the thought of her mother’s intense anxiety to see her married came across her. If she refused Mr. Leighton, she

resolved quickly that she must never let her mother know that the offer had been made. "I can't be bound to marry to please anyone but myself," she protested silently. But the truth was she was beginning to feel that she was surrounded by circumstances that made her acceptance of the offer easy, and her rejection of it difficult. The special character of her mother's illness would cause any new anxiety or disappointment to be fatal ; her own poverty and dependence weighed on her as a heavy burden. Young, strong, vigorous, and intelligent as she was, she had been trained to no employment that would fit her to earn her own living. "I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed," she said bitterly. She thrust Mr. Leighton's letter into her pocket, and tried to leave off thinking what answer it would be necessary to send to it. She tried to be hopeful about the result of the visit to the physician. If he reassured her as to her mother's health, all her difficulties and troubles would vanish ; everything would be easy. Even a possible conflict with her mother on the subject of the answer to Mr. Leighton's let-

ter would be terrible no longer, but only disagreeable. Then her mother's bell rang, and Janet ran upstairs (interminable London stairs), to help her to dress. Of course Mrs. Doncaster knew nothing of the letter, and Janet said not a word about it. She tried to banish it from her thoughts, but she could not lose the consciousness that she had an offer of marriage from Mr. Leighton in her pocket.

Mrs. Doncaster was very quiet, but it needed all her self-control to remain so ; she noticed something unusual in her daughter's manner. She did not, however, attribute it to any other cause than that which had brought them to London ; but the poor child was thinking what her answer to the letter would be if Dr. Bird confirmed her worst fears about her mother ; or rather she was trying not to think of it, nor of anything but attending to her mother.

An hour afterwards Mrs. Doncaster was awaiting her turn to be summoned to the presence of the physician. She had insisted that she would see him alone, and while she was in the consulting-room Janet sat in sickening suspense in another room.

Mrs. Doncaster succeeded in hearing the whole truth from the physician. After he had satisfied himself as to the nature of her case, he requested to see her daughter, but she said she wished to hear herself exactly what his opinion was.

"You need not fear telling me the truth," she said. "I have long believed that I shall not recover; and it is particularly important for the prospects of my child that I should know exactly what my health is likely to be. I have an income for my life only, and I want to know what provision I shall be able to make for her." She spoke very calmly and quietly. Dr. Bird looked at her with a doctor's critical eye, and judged her fit to hear her sentence. It was a sentence of death, to be carried out at no very distant date.

There was a look of intense anguish in Mrs. Doncaster's face when she heard her fate; but she was still calm.

"Will you send for my daughter? But don't tell her; I will tell her myself."

Janet came, and Mrs. Doncaster took her arm to leave the room. Dr. Bird's solemn face told Janet

what his opinion had been ; he said he would write to her all directions for her mother's treatment, and whispered that it was exceedingly important to keep her mother from all excitement and agitation. Two minutes after the mother and daughter were in the rattling cab again, going back to their lodgings. Mrs. Doncaster did not speak, she could not trust herself to do so ; she was white and trembling, and she clung to Janet as a child clings to its nurse.

When they reached their own room, Janet ventured to ask, " What did Dr. Bird say, darling mother ? "

" That I have not many months to live," she whispered ; and with the words the restraint which she had put upon herself was broken, and she gave way under the load of grief and suspense she had borne. In vain Janet endeavoured to soothe and comfort her. " I cannot bear it ; I cannot bear it," said the poor mother, and, starting up, she began to pace rapidly up and down the room, wringing her hands and weeping. Janet dreaded the worst consequences from this excitement, but

all her endeavours to calm her mother were in vain.

"Janet, Janet, my child, how can I leave you all alone in the world?"

"Couldn't we write to grandpapa, darling mother? He would be kind to us now."

But Mrs. Doncaster shook her head impatiently. "He is cruel to me, he would be more cruel to you; he has told me already he will do nothing for you."

"Perhaps he would be kind to us now," repeated Janet, trying to ease her mother's restless agony. "Let me write to him, mother?"

"Never, never; you don't know what you are saying. I leave you without a friend in the world."

Her passionate sobs shook her whole frame; she refused to lie down or to let Janet support her, and continued her walking up and down the room, although Janet saw that she frequently had to prevent herself from falling by taking hold of some article of furniture. Janet felt utterly powerless and in despair. At this moment a knock was

heard at the door of the room, and a servant entered.

"Another letter for you, Miss," she said, handing a note to Janet. She was going to put it into her pocket unopened, when her mother saw a well-known blue and gold hieroglyph on the seal. "It is from Lady Ann Leighton," she said. "Open it, Janet." Janet obeyed. This was the letter :—

"Norborough Hall. Wednesday.

"DEAREST JANET,

"I have guessed Charlie's secret, and he has confessed to me that he has written to ask you to be his wife. Say 'Yes,' my sweet girl, and make me and his mother the happiest old women in England.

"Your affectionate

"A. L."

Janet glanced rapidly over the note, and her resolution was taken.

"Mother dear," she said, putting her arm round Mrs. Doncaster's waist, "one thing that makes

you so unhappy is that you think that I shall be alone when ——” Here the poor child broke down.

“Yes, yes,” said Mrs. Doncaster, trying to escape and begin her restless pacing of the room again. “It makes me mad almost.”

“But, dear mother, you must not trouble about that any more. It isn’t as you think. I shall not be alone. Mr. Leighton has asked me to marry him, and I shall say that I will.”

“Is that what the letter is about? Does Lady Ann set herself against it?”

“No, dear, she wishes me to marry him; look.” And she put the letter into her mother’s hands.

“Thank God, thank God,” said Mrs. Doncaster. The wild flushed look left her face; she suffered Janet to lead her to the sofa, and she lay there holding her daughter’s hand, and saying, “This is a comfort, this is a comfort. How good God is to send this mercy just at the time I needed it most.” And stroking Janet’s hair, she added after a pause, “And how faithless I was, but He is faithful;

what a Father, what a friend He is." Then she lay quite calm and still, not asleep, for Janet saw her smiling and sometimes whispering to herself. Presently she asked Janet to fetch her a little diary in which she entered religious reflections and texts of Scripture.

"Write in it for me, my child," she said.

Janet opened the book at the place for December 8. For several days previous to that date there were no entries.

"What shall I write?" said Janet.

"'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.'"

"Yes," said Janet.

"Now write, 'I have been young, and now am old, and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread.'"

When Janet had done that, Mrs. Doncaster held out her hand for the book, and she added herself in pencil underneath Janet's writing, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

In after years Janet used not infrequently to look at those faint pencil marks with feelings in

which tender regret and bitter grief were strangely mingled.

Mrs. Doncaster now composed herself to sleep, and Janet sat by the fireside thinking. "What had she done? Had she been right or wrong?" She made herself think of all she knew about her lover, and it seemed to her that she knew nothing that was not to his credit. It was true she had taken a prejudice against his manner, but manner was a mere superficial thing, and she was sure that even what she disliked in it arose from kindness of heart. He certainly was very generous; how ready he had been to help them about the Sunday School, and how devoted Lady Ann and Mrs. Leighton were to him. That kind of devoted love doesn't grow up between relations, she thought, unless it is nourished by sterling good qualities on both sides. In this way she convinced herself that he must be very good indeed. It was another proof of her lover's goodness, and of the disinterestedness of his family, that he should seek her for his wife—a penniless country girl, without rank, fortune, connections, or accomplishments, or any

one of the things that people in their rank usually expect to find in their wives. How kindly Lady Ann had written to her. She had evidently feared that Janet might hesitate to accept Charlie's offer, thinking that the marriage would be unwelcome to his relations ; and so she wrote in order to put Janet at her ease on that score. What tact and delicacy her letter showed. "How good they all are to me !" thought Janet. "I have done nothing to deserve so much kindness." Then she began to think about herself and her own feelings towards this King Cophetua, who had stepped down from his throne and asked her to marry him. No one in the whole world had ever dreamed that the beggar-girl declined the honour. The beggar-girl's assent is a matter of course. "Well, I'm a beggar-girl, if ever there was one," she mused. "There is not a single thing in the world, by which I could earn my own living, that I'm fit to do. A governess ? —Nonsense. I know nothing. I'm not fit to be a housemaid ;" and then she thought over a score of occupations, humble and menial enough, for which she declared she had no

qualifications. " But is my being a beggar reason enough for accepting him ? Do I love him ? Isn't it very unjust to him to accept him if I don't ? I don't suppose I am in love ; I don't know, I like him well enough, but I don't feel any of the raptures that are described in books. I wonder if most people feel them ; if they do I should think the rapture wears off after they have been married a little time. At least I don't know any married people who seem very rapturously in love with each other. And if the enthusiasm lasts such a little time, I don't see any special reason why one should make a great point of starting with it. Of course, if you have that kind of feeling towards anyone else, it's different. But I'm quite sure I'm not in love with anyone else, and so there is nothing to prevent my regard for Mr. Leighton growing deeper and stronger. And then poor mother ! Even if I liked him much less than I do, I believe I should accept him for her sake. When I told her about it, the news worked like a charm. If she must die, she will at least die happy and at peace. Yes, I am very glad I told her that

I would accept him ; it was the right thing to do."

Then she got up and walked to her mother's side. She was still sleeping, and Janet noticed with a sigh of relief how calm her face was, and how tranquil she appeared. And she repeated to herself, " Yes, it is the right thing to do."

Then she took her writing materials, and wrote the following letter : —

"Brown Street. December 8.

"MY DEAR MR. LEIGHTON,

"I am very grateful for what you and Lady Ann have written to me. I am afraid I do not deserve the love that you have given me, but I will try to be worthy of it. I accept it gratefully, and will endeavour to make you happy. I cannot write any more, for I am very unhappy. Dr. Bird has given a very bad account of my mother. I expect we shall return to Norborough almost directly, without waiting for Miss Chesney's marriage.

"Thank Lady Ann for me.

"Always yours,

"JANET DONCASTER."

This was rather a strange love-letter, but it was what naturally occurred to Janet to write. She did not hesitate at all over it till she came to the end. "Yours sincerely" would have been true, but somehow it looked so awfully matter of fact, and Janet was too honest to put in any warmly loving conclusion, so she contented herself with the vague compromise, "Always yours."

Later in the evening came a letter from Dr. Bird to Janet, giving her directions for the care of her mother, and advising that she should return home at once, and be kept as quiet as possible. He held out no hope of her ultimate recovery, but said that the only chance of her life being prolonged for a time lay in careful watching, and in perfect tranquillity and repose. So Janet arranged that they should return to Norborough on the next day but one, and she wrote to that effect to Lady Ann, and also to her mother's old servant, bidding her to make all things ready for them. Miss Chesney spent the greater part of the next day with them. Of course she was told of Janet's engagement. She was rather puzzled about it, but finally set

down Janet's reticence on the subject to her anxiety about her mother. Of Mrs. Doncaster's satisfaction there could be no doubt. Miss Chesney therefore concluded that it was really a matter for congratulation, although her friend did not seem as joyous as a newly-engaged girl generally does.

On the following day the mother and daughter left London, and Janet appreciated the attention of her lover when she found the Leighton carriage waiting at the Norborough station for her mother and herself. On reaching home, Mrs. Barker, their old servant, greeted them affectionately. Everything looked bright and homelike.

"See here, Miss Janet," said Mrs. Barker, "isn't that lovely now?"—showing a beautiful group of delicate flowers and ferns. "Mr. Leighton, he come here this very morning, and set that up himself."

"How kind he is," said Janet; and the old woman grinned. In reply to the grin Janet said—

"I have promised to marry him, Mrs. Barker."

"Well, lor, then, there, he don't ought to be

anything but kind," said Mrs. Barker, highly delighted. "Now you won't believe me, Miss, what I'm a-saying of, but the fust time iver I see him a-handing you out o' that carriage, I say to myself, I say, 'They'll be man an' wife before a year's out.' I wish you joy, Miss, with all my heart, that I do, and Missus too, and Mr. Leighton too."

Here Mrs. Barker's feelings became too many for her, and when Janet thanked her, and shook her hand, she retired into the kitchen to cry, saying she was right glad, that she was.

Perhaps Janet would not have thought so much of her lover's attentions if she had known how large a proportion of her gratitude was in justice due to Lady Ann.





CHAPTER XI.

LADY ANN ROUTS THE ENEMY WITH GREAT SLAUGHTER.



ADY ANN was very jubilant when the contents of Janet's letter were made known to her. She felt confident that all would now go well, and she regarded the complete reform of her nephew almost as an accomplished fact. She thought, however, it would be well to have a talk with Charlie on the subject.

"It now depends on yourself alone," she said, "whether you lead a happy and useful life, or whether you drag us all down to unspeakable wretchedness and misery. You now have the strongest motive to lead an honourable and honoured life that a man possibly can have ; you have

won the love of a charming girl, and her happiness of course depends on you."

"I will never cause her one moment's grief," he said, with more energy than Lady Ann had ever yet heard in his voice. "I have been thinking about it," he went on, "a great deal since I had her letter, and she says she's grateful to me, and that she don't deserve so much love. And I thought to myself, 'Good God, if she only knew what you know, she wouldn't say anything about gratitude.' I begin to think I was a scoundrel ever to have asked her to have me."

"My dear boy, don't give way to these morbid thoughts; it is her love that will save you from yourself."

"Yes, but it's risking her happiness in order to give me another chance."

Lady Ann frowned. "Who can have been putting these ideas into his head," she thought; if it is Forsyth, I will let him know what I think of his conduct." But she said aloud—

"You will utterly destroy her happiness if you draw out of your engagement now. The best and

the most honourable thing you can do is never to let her know what we have suffered in the past. This you can do, if you have enough resolution to prevent all similar suffering in the future. If you cannot make this resolution, of course I ought to go to her at once and tell her the whole truth. I never should have sanctioned your making her an offer unless I had believed that you were firmly resolved to give up your unfortunate habit."

"I am resolved," he said; "most firmly resolved."

"Then she is a most fortunate girl, and your wife will be a very happy woman. Dear Charlie," she said, "I know I may rely on you. She shall never know what we have gone through, and you will keep your resolution; the future seems very bright for you both."

She was still anxious to find out what had awakened these doubts and misgivings in her nephew. "Have you mentioned your engagement yet to anyone?" she asked.

"Only to Forsyth," he replied.

"And he told you you were bound in honour to break it off?"

Charlie assented. "Not very disinterested advice, considering he would like to be engaged to her himself. If he has the impertinence to speak to you in that way again, tell him you are aware of the generosity of his motives."

"Ah, yes, I hadn't thought of that," said Charlie.

"Of course it's obvious what his object was in talking to you in that way. It is the most abominable conduct. I hope you will never again pay the smallest attention to anything he says on the subject."

Charlie promised acquiescence, and Lady Ann, who was in a white heat of indignation with Forsyth, and quite ready for a battle royal with him, put an end to the conversation by ringing the bell, and desiring the servant to tell Mr. Forsyth she would be obliged if he would come and speak to her. Mr. Leighton "scented the battle from afar," and departed. Forsyth was not long in obeying Lady Ann's summons; he was quite as anxious to

quarrel with her as she was to attack him. The news of Charlie's engagement had, in fact, put him in the mood to quarrel with everybody. He was angry with Janet, though he did not do her the injustice of supposing she was aware that Mr. Leighton was a drunkard. Over and over again he swore to himself that he did not care three straws for her, and that he never had, but that it was enough to make anyone savage to see a girl deliberately sell herself to a man, for whom it was impossible she could feel any affection, simply because he was rich. Then he determined that he would bring the engagement to an end by insisting that Janet should be told the whole truth about Mr. Leighton. He would try to shame Charlie himself into telling her, or at any rate into breaking off the engagement. If this failed, he would give Lady Ann the choice, whether Janet should be told by her or by himself. For told by some one he was determined she should be; for though, he said to himself, she ought to be ashamed of herself, she doesn't deserve anything so bad as being allowed actually to marry that fellow. His con-

tempt for Charlie was profound. Forsyth was sure that Leighton never would have thought of asking Janet to marry him unless it had been suggested to him by Lady Ann. "He will do anything, say anything, think anything, and believe anything that the person who last talks to him puts into his head," thought Forsyth; and that the engagement with Janet had been planned by Lady Ann he now had not the smallest doubt. He was therefore quite ready to have a hostile encounter with her.

When he entered the room Lady Ann was standing near the fireplace.

"I am surprised to find from Mr. Leighton," she said, in the coldest tones of authority, "that you have thought fit, Mr. Forsyth, to interfere, that is, to offer your advice—interference is out of your power—in a matter of private concern to him and to his family!"

"I think your ladyship," he replied, taking his tone from hers, "has hardly chosen the right expression even now. I have neither interfered with Mr. Leighton's engagement, nor offered him any advice about it. I told him the truth, that if he

marries Miss Doncaster, and lets her find out when it is too late that her husband is a drunkard, he and everyone concerned in it will be doing a most dastardly, cruel thing ! ”

“ Mr. Forsyth,” she said, fiercely, “ how dare you use such language to me ? ”

“ The language isn’t nice,” he retorted ; “ but it suits what you are doing. I never was very happy in describing nasty things in nice words.”

The battle wasn’t going at all as Lady Ann had intended. She was not going to demean herself by defending her conduct from the attacks of a secretary. The assault clearly should come from her ; so she replied—

“ I do not choose to make any reply to language which you will bitterly regret when you come to your right senses. But consider what you are doing, and then think whether I have not cause for displeasure ? Actuated by jealousy, yes, by jealousy,” she repeated, seeing Forsyth start, “ you are trying to take away Mr. Leighton’s last hope of reform. Nay, it is more than a hope, it is a certainty of reform, and you are trying to drag it

away from him. To snatch a rope from the grasp of a drowning man would be a generous action compared with what you are doing!"

"You are wrong in talking about jealousy," he replied; "if I had never seen Miss Doncaster I should feel quite as strongly as I do now that you have no right to risk the ruin of her life on the chance of saving his."

"She runs no risk of ruin," said Lady Ann. "On the contrary, I say, and all the world would agree with me, that it is an extraordinarily good match for her!"

"Good God!" he cried, "a good match! However, there seems to be no object in continuing this conversation; we don't seem likely to come to any agreement. I have only one thing more to say. I have told Leighton what I think of his marriage, and I think it is quite possible that he may break off the engagement himself."

"I have seen him since you put that notion into his head, and you may rest assured that he will do nothing of the kind," she said.

He went on: "Then what I have to say is

simplified. I now have to submit an alternative to your ladyship. Either you will tell Miss Doncaster at once that Mr. Leighton is an hereditary drunkard, and that the family disease has broken out in him at intervals from the time he was sixteen up to now——”

“Up to eighteen months ago,” interrupted Lady Ann; but he went on without noticing her.

“And that such degree of soberness as he has acquired is the result of constant watchfulness, of such a nature as to require two persons’ undivided attention. Either you will tell her all this, or I shall.”

Lady Ann replied, without the smallest shadow of hesitation, “She knows it already. I told her ten days ago, several days before Charlie made her an offer. We have nothing whatever to fear from you, Mr. Forsyth.”

He was struck dumb. Her words cut him to the quick. He *had* loved Janet Doncaster, he confessed silently; he had thought her good and pure, and now his love dropped down dead, shot through the heart by her baseness. Lady Ann perceived her advantage, and went on—

"I do not wonder at your having made this mistake, for Mr. Leighton does not know that I have told Miss Doncaster what our past trials have been. I purposely kept that knowledge from him."

"You told her," he repeated; "you told her that your nephew was a drunkard?"

"I have already said so!" replied she, with great hauteur.

"And after that she accepts an offer of marriage from him?"

Lady Ann bowed her head. Forsyth gave a short laugh that was not pleasant to hear.

"And now," said Lady Ann, "I hope you will attend to my wishes that you should give up your attempt to deprive my nephew of the means of saving himself from the fearful curse under which he has laboured. And allow me to add that you will do well to learn from what has passed between us, to be less violent in your language, and less hasty in concluding that everyone must be wrong except yourself!"

"You have a good right to say that," he replied. "I beg your pardon for the words I used

to you, and for what I thought of you, too ; and you may be sure I shall not do anything now to stop the marriage."

"I am glad to hear you say this," she said, with some graciousness in her tone. "You have done what you can to retrieve your error, and we shall not part bad friends."

She offered him her hand as a token of reconciliation. He took it silently. No suspicion that she had lied to him crossed his mind ; he only felt that the battle was over, that he had been thoroughly routed, and that his conqueror was treating him with some generosity. When he left the room he could not settle to any occupation. His mind was full of what he had heard about Janet. "It is inconceivable," he thought. "She always seemed so frank and honest, and to care for luxuries so little, and yet she consents to this marriage for the sake, I suppose, of being rich and a fine lady. Rank must be an attraction to her, I suppose, and yet I used to think that there was not a trace of snobbishness in her. Fancy those clear truthful eyes of hers ! How will they look when she swears

to love and honour a man she knows to be a drunkard? It is horrible, it is impossible!" And he tried to leave off thinking of her as the sordid, degraded, dishonest creature she now was in his eyes; and to cherish the memory of what he once believed her to be—gentle, pure, brave, and honest. He would blot out her degradation from his mind, and think of her as a dear friend who was dead. He never would see her again, he declared; the very thought of seeing her after she had lost her maidenly truthfulness and purity was inexpressibly distasteful to him. It would be like seeing the corpse of a beloved friend mangled and befouled by wild beasts. No, he would carry away with him as a last memory of her, her image as she was before she assented to this unnatural and ignominious marriage.

Lady Ann, so far as she was concerned, was very glad that Forsyth and Janet should not meet again. She was not easy until he had left Norborough. His impertinence it was, she reflected, which had obliged her to go a little beyond the truth in regard to what she had told him about Janet. Lady Ann

was not a woman to make herself comfortable under the consciousness of having told a direct lie. So she assured herself that she had had no choice but between her nephew's immediate and utter ruin and a slight exaggeration. That it was only an exaggeration on her part to tell Forsyth that Janet knew of Mr. Leighton's propensity when she did not, Lady Ann convinced herself by the following reasoning. In the first place she thought it was highly probable she would have to tell Janet at some future time ; in which case, what she had told Forsyth was a mere inaccuracy with regard to time. In the second place she endeavoured to persuade herself, and with partial success, that Janet would have accepted Charlie all the same had she known the whole truth. In which case her own inaccuracy of statement was perfectly immaterial. In the third place she hoped that Janet would never need to be told at all ; in which case she had acted for the best, at considerable sacrifice to herself. In the fourth place she would arrange that Charlie was very liberal to Janet in the way of settlements and bequests ; and lastly, in the fifth place, she was not

going to submit to have terms dictated to her and her plans destroyed by a secretary whom she had engaged at a salary of so much a year.

So Lady Ann's conscience was clear ; she petted Janet and Mrs. Doncaster with a light heart. She told those of her own relations to whom she wrote on the subject, that though the coming marriage might almost be considered a *mésalliance*, so far as position in society went, yet the girl was so nice and so devotedly attached to Charlie, that she and Mrs. Leighton had quite reconciled themselves to the engagement.

The Norborough people shared Lady Ann's opinion as to the match being an extraordinarily good one for Janet. Mrs. Doncaster's illness protected Janet in some degree from the downpour of congratulations with which she would otherwise have been inundated, but she had, nevertheless, frequent opportunities of hearing that her neighbours were delighted at her good fortune. Mrs. Sedgely was not the least surprised ; for, although she never repeated what she heard, they did say that Mr. Leighton and Janet Doncaster were en-

gaged within a week of the gentleman's arrival in Norborough. Mrs. Grey said she would be among the first to congratulate Miss Doncaster, though what Mr. Leighton could see in her, she, Mrs. Grey, was at a loss to imagine ; to compare her with her own two dear girls was absolutely absurd. The Miss Greys tossed their heads and said, " Ma, how can you ?" and they showed that they bore Janet no ill-will for her success in life by beginning a large piece of Berlin wool-work, representing Brobdingnag roses, which they intended to give Janet as a wedding present. Mrs. Ralph supposed that Janet would hold her head very high now. Captain Macduff called at Mrs. Doncaster's for the purpose of saying he hoped Mr. Leighton, among his other possessions, " had found the one thing needful," but Mrs. Doncaster was too ill to see him. Mr. Doubleday, the clergyman, who always carefully avoided talking shop, congratulated Mrs. Doncaster, on one of his pastoral visits, that Mr. Leighton had sought the world over, and had come to Norborough for a bride. He also congratulated himself, in silence, that, with some elaboration, this

sentiment would serve for the staple of his speech at the wedding breakfast.

So all Janet's little world applauded the marriage. Forsyth left Norborough without seeing her again, and there was no one else both able and willing to save her. Mrs. Doncaster died very quietly and peacefully in her daughter's arms about the end of December ; and six weeks after that Janet was married to Charles Leighton.





CHAPTER XII.

JANET'S HONEYMOON.



ADY ANN was as good as her word in having a liberal settlement made on Janet at her marriage. Mr. Broadley, who volunteered his services as Janet's legal protector, was astonished and delighted at Mr. Leighton's generosity. "It really makes it of very little consequence, settling your own little income upon you, my dear young lady," he said to Janet.

"I didn't know I had an income!" said Janet.

"Well, it isn't much, certainly," he replied, smiling; "50*l.* a year at the outside. The sale of the furniture and your poor mamma's balance, will make up, after everything is paid, about 400*l.* Your grandpapa, I am glad to say, wishes you to accept as a wedding present, the sum that he would

have allowed to your poor mamma for the current year, had her life been spared. These sums, properly invested, together with a few shares which Mrs. Doncaster possessed, will realize about 50% a year. It isn't much, but I may as well include it in the marriage settlement."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Janet, who thought she would like to have a little money quite of her own, that she could pension Mrs. Barker with if she liked. When she suggested this to Mrs. Barker, the old woman begged hard to be allowed to stay with Janet, and earn whatever she received. "I have heard tell, Miss Janet," she said, "that gentlefolks' servants is shockin' at house cleaning and sich like. Now my pleasure's in it, that that is. And I don't ought to be idle, but I couldn't abide being along with anyone save you and your dear ma!" So Janet promised that Mrs. Barker should stay with her always, and the good old woman's heart was comforted. One of her neighbours to whom she communicated the news that she was going "along with Miss Janet" to the Hall, ventured to hint that neither she nor Janet were in such low spirits as

they ought to be, only a month after Mrs. Doncaster's death. "Mrs. Pallant," said Mrs. Barker in a sepulchral voice, "if tears would awook her, she would awook afore this. Nothing on't wake her now, save the last trump ; no more it on't." Mrs. Pallant felt that the logic of this was unanswerable, and so did Mrs. Barker, who moreover was very glad to have a good reason to allege for her undisguised triumph at the approaching marriage.

The honeymoon was a cause of some anxiety to Lady Ann. She had now persuaded herself that she would have told Janet everything soon after the engagement, if it had not been for Mrs. Doncaster's illness and death. Then afterwards, when the wedding-day was fixed, the impossibility of telling her was apparent. No, she would get the marriage and the honeymoon over, and after that, if necessary, she would tell Janet what she had saved Charlie from. It was arranged that Mr. and Mrs. Charles Leighton should spend the month after their marriage at a small country house in Surrey, lent for the purpose by Lord Comberbatch. Marston was

of course to be in personal attendance on his master. Lady Ann gave him a word that he should be specially vigilant, but she did not dare to tell him that Janet was entirely ignorant of Mr. Leighton's craving for drink. She thought she had said quite enough to put Marston on his guard. "It is most important," she had said, "that Mrs. Charles Leighton should have no trouble or anxiety while she is in Surrey. So remember to be most careful and watchful ; run no risks whatever."

For about a fortnight after their arrival at Lord Comberbatch's cottage, Mr. and Mrs. Leighton's honeymoon was not distinguished by any remarkable event. Janet immensely enjoyed that beautiful country ; she sometimes persuaded her husband to take a long walk with her over heath and hill. These excursions tired him, but he was always anxious to do what she wished, and to have all his occupations suggested by her. She thought she began to understand him better than she had done before. She believed she had never till then done justice to the gentleness and affection of his nature. She sometimes was quite frightened at finding how

complete her authority was over him : she found they passed day after day in which she suggested and he acquiesced. " I wish he would sometimes say that he would do something that I don't want him to do," thought Janet. At first she attributed his acquiescence in all she proposed to special circumstances. " I suppose all husbands are very docile for a month or two after they are married," she thought, with a smile ; but afterwards she noticed that he was almost more submissive to Marston than he was to her. His own wishes were always laid aside if Marston suggested any difficulty in carrying them out. This discovery annoyed Janet, and made her take a prejudice against Marston ; her irritation was increased by the man being perpetually in attendance on them. If they drove out, Marston was there ; if they walked, Marston would appear, with his hat in his hand, the picture of respectful propriety, and suggest that he had better follow them with umbrellas, in case of rain. " Why did you say ' Very well,' Charlie ? " whispered Janet. " I'm sure we don't want him : there's not the smallest chance of rain, and

if there were, we could carry umbrellas for ourselves." Charlie looked so distressed between his two rulers, that Janet dropped the subject. Marston always waited on them at dinner; he poured out the wine, and always put it away in the side-board, locking it, and putting the key in his pocket. At first Janet was very much amused at this. "I suppose he thinks we should drink too much," she said, "if he let us have the key!" One evening at dinner they had some dish which Janet declared ought to have a sauce of burning brandy. "My great idea in cooking is burning brandy. If I had to order dinner, I should always have some fireworks in one form or another. Will you bring some brandy, please?" she added, turning to Marston.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," he said, "there is no brandy in the 'ouse!"

Janet believed, she scarcely knew why, probably from something in the tone of the man's voice, that this was not true. When he went out of the room she said, "That man rules us with a rod of iron; I believe he thinks we are perfect babies, and that

we should set our pinafores on fire if we had *sauce aux enfers*."

"He means it all in kindness, dearest," said her husband.

"He may mean it in kindness, but it is perfectly ridiculous. Will you bet me half-a-dozen pair of gloves that there is not a bottle of brandy in the sideboard?"

Here Marston re-entered, and Janet said, as he began taking the wine away in his usual manner, "Leave the sideboard unlocked, Marston. The wine can remain on the table until we go into the next room."

The man looked imploringly at her; she interpreted his expression as astonishment at her audacity, and felt that if she let him have his own way she would be in subjection to him forever. Seeing him hesitate, she repeated her wish authoritatively, and the man replaced the decanters on the table with a bang. Janet thought this was merely a piece of impertinence, but in reality the bang meant, "Well, if she thinks she's clever enough to manage him like this, let her try. I have tried

that way too, and I know what it'll come to." When the servants had finally left the room, Janet said, "Marston and I shall be very good friends when he understands that I have not a submissive disposition. Now, Charlie, what will you bet about the brandy?"

"O! don't go to the sideboard," said the wretched man.

"Nonsense," laughed Janet, and opening the wine-drawer, she drew out, with a little laugh of triumph, a bottle of brandy three-parts full. "There," she cried, "I shall leave it on the table to show the magnificent Marston that I have found him out."

Charlie's eyes were fixed on the bottle as if it had fascinated him.

"I suppose it is brandy," he said.

"We will make quite sure," she said, "for I should be deeply humbled if it turned out to be sherry in a brandy-bottle;" and she poured out a teaspoonful in a wineglass, and handed it to her husband. "Well," she said, as he put down the glass.

"Yes, it's brandy," he replied, getting up from the table and walking to the window. He felt the fierce excitement coming on, the intense craving that he never yet had been able voluntarily to withstand. He tried now, poor creature, to drag himself away from the temptation. "Put the bottle away, Janet," he said in a strange, hoarse voice.

She was startled, but no suspicion of the truth crossed her mind.

"Why?" she said. "What can Marston do to us? Do you think he will whip us, and lock us up in disgrace?"

He did not answer, and presently she left the room, saying she would write a few letters in the drawing-room before he joined her.

It is difficult to write of what followed. Janet's letters took longer to write than she had expected. She had been in the drawing-room about an hour, when she got up and looked in the dining-room, to say she had finished. The candles were burning, and the room looked just as she had left it, except that she did not see her husband. "He has gone to the smoking-room," she thought;

"I expect he was tired of waiting for me." She went to the smoking-room. He was not there, and she returned to the drawing-room, and rang the bell. When Marston appeared, she ordered tea, and said, "Has Mr. Leighton gone out?"

"I 'aven't seen 'im, ma'am," said Marston. "I 'aven't 'eard 'im leave the dining-room."

Janet rose and went again into the dining-room, followed by Marston, who was anxious to see how Mrs. Leighton's plan of managing his master had succeeded.

"No, he is not here," she said, turning again to the drawing-room. As she turned, she caught sight of Marston's anxious face.

"Is anything the matter? Has anything happened?" she asked quickly.

The man walked to the table, and held up the now almost empty brandy-bottle.

"That's what's the matter, ma'am," he said laconically. He was not cruel, but he thought Mrs. Leighton wanted a lesson not to set up her way against his, and that now she had got it.

"What do you mean?" cried poor Janet, now

dimly conscious that some catastrophe had overtaken her.

Marston was walking round the table looking on the floor. "'Ere he is, ma'am," he said, when he reached the side of the table furthest from the door. Janet rushed forward, and saw her husband unconscious on the ground; he had fallen on his face. She gave a cry of distress, and fell on her knees at his side, trying to raise him. Marston stopped her. "Best leave 'im to me now," he said.

"What do you mean? Why do you speak like that?" she cried.

Marston now saw she knew nothing.

"They that 'ave married him and you, ma'am, 'as done a wicked thing. If I 'ad known 'ow you was put upon, I'd 'ave told you myself, that I would, Lady Ann or no Lady Ann."

Janet was still on her knees beside her husband; she looked up at Marston with weary, wondering eyes. All nervous and muscular power had suddenly left her. She felt powerless to move, or even to speak. Marston went on: "Mr. Leighton

'as been like this from a boy, ma'am ; and I'm told 'is father and grandfather was so before 'im. It's a bad job, that it is, but I've seen 'im like it many times before, and 'e'll come round again, ma'am, don't you fear."

" Seen him like it many times before," repeated Janet, mechanically.

" Yes, ma'am, but I will say I never knew 'im to 'ave drunk so much brandy at once. Why, there's a pint and an 'alf gone out of this bottle, if there's a drop."

Janet started as if the lash of a whip had struck her. She dropped her husband's hand, and threw her arms upon the table, leaning her head upon them. Marston pitied her from his heart, but what could he do ? He thought he had better leave her to get over her sorrow alone, and lifting his master in his arms he carried him out of the room.

An hour afterwards Marston crept quietly back to the dining-room, and looking in at the open door, he saw Janet still kneeling exactly as he had left her. What could he do ? He did not dare to

send any of the women servants to her, for they must not be allowed to know the cause of her distress.

"Mrs. Leighton, ma'am," he said at last, "I have done all I can for 'im, and he'll do now, and be about again by this time to-morrow."

Janet lifted her head. How blank and dreary her face was! What a contrast to the blithe young hopefulness that once marked it! "I wish he was dead," she thought. Marston did not like to leave her where she was.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said, "this is a sad blow for you, but you'll learn to get used to it in time. There's a great deal to be done with 'im, with proper care. But I do say Lady Ann has done very bad by you."

"She knew it all the time," exclaimed Janet, starting to her feet.

"Oh, yes, ma'am. Why, me and Mr. Forsyth 'ad nothing else to do than to keep 'im from the drink. I didn't think but what you knew about it, and that Lady Ann thought you'd manage 'im well, and that you was willing to undertake it."

Janet's eyes lit up with a fierce fire when she

heard these words. Her helpless, hopeless anguish changed into a wild fury of impotent rage. She could have killed Lady Ann with her own hands at that moment. She felt that a trap had been laid for her, and that she had fallen into it, and that there was no chance either of liberty or vengeance. She would be face to face with Lady Ann the very next day, and demand to know the object she had had in scheming the ruin and desolation of her life. Whatever that object was it should be thwarted, that Janet swore to herself. She paced up and down the room in feverish pain. "It can never be undone, never, never!" she said aloud, thinking of her marriage. Then the sense of her utter loneliness in the world came upon her. She had no one to go to; no friend on whose help to rely. Margaret Chesney was only just returned from her wedding journey. Janet felt she did not dare to break upon her friend's happiness with her own ghastly story. Then a sudden thought flashed across her mind. Suppose Marston's story were untrue—that he was playing a trick upon her in revenge for the authority she had assumed over

him. But no, that was too unlikely ; there was the empty brandy-bottle standing there as a witness of the truth of what Marston had told her. But then, her husband might have had a fit, or he might have fainted, and Marston have emptied the bottle for the purpose of imposing upon her. The thought came like a sudden gleam of sunshine. The night was now far advanced, and the house was silent. Janet crept quietly upstairs, and listened at the door of her own room. She heard nothing ; then she went in, and found it empty. Mr. Leighton's dressing-room was also empty. She went on to the door of another room, which had been hitherto unused. She stood there trembling like a guilty creature, as she heard the sound of heavy breathing within. She turned the handle, and entered noiselessly. Marston was in an easy-chair by the fire, asleep ; by his side was a small table with soda-water and other bottles upon it. Her husband was lying in the bed. A single glance at his swollen, purple face confirmed the truth of Marston's story. Never, as long as she lived, could Janet forget the terrible loathing and

disgust which seized her as she stood there. She turned away from the bedside with a hasty movement which awoke Marston. He started when he saw her, and was almost frightened when he noticed the violent expression of disgust on her white face.

"Has he looked like that before?" she said.

"Well, yes, ma'am, at times," he replied.

She shuddered. "I am going to Norborough by the first train in the morning. Tell one of the men to be ready to drive me to the station at six o'clock. I shall not come in here again.

"Excuse the liberty that I'm taking, ma'am, but I doubt you ought to take some rest."

"Thank you," she said, wearily, "but I cannot rest till I've seen Lady Ann Leighton. Good-bye, Marston."

Then she left the room, and Marston remarked to himself, "She's a deep 'un, is Lady Ann, but I reckon she won't make much out of this business."

Janet passed the remainder of the night restlessly longing for the morning. The necessary inactivity of the night galled and irritated her; she longed to be on her way to Lady Ann. An anticipated day

of happiness was never longed for with half the eagerness with which Janet longed for this day of pain and misery. Every minute seemed an hour. In order to pass away the time, she collected and put in a box everything she had with her that had belonged to her before her marriage. In another box she put everything that had been given to her by her husband, or by any member of his family; and in this box also she put the clothes which she had bought for herself in preparation for her marriage. She locked the box and directed it to Lady Ann Leighton. She would have nothing to do with anything that reminded her of her marriage. This occupation passed away some of the weary night. Then she took the railway guide, and looked out the trains by which she could go on, through London, to Norborough. An hour before it was time to go Janet was perfectly ready. She carried down the little bag that she intended to take with her into the hall. She passed by the dining-room door with a shudder. "That is where he lay," she thought. Then she went back to her room. Half an hour after she heard a knock at her

door, and opening it, found Mrs. Brownlow, the housekeeper.

"Mr. Marston told me you were leaving, ma'am, and I've got your breakfast ready."

Janet came down obediently, but she was too excited to eat. Mrs. Brownlow had been partially taken into Marston's confidence, and she thought she might venture on "a word in season."

"This world's full of trouble, ma'am," she said ; "but we must look above, and not repine when the Lord lays His hand upon us."

The inappropriateness of these commonplaces irritated Janet. She longed to tell the woman that the Lord had nothing to do with her misfortunes ; that they were the devil's work, and not God's. But she held her peace, and Mrs. Brownlow went on, "We know, ma'am, what Scripture says—'Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth!'"

Poor Janet started up from her chair with a gesture of impatience. "I cannot listen to this kind of talk," she exclaimed ; "you mean to be kind, but I can't bear it."

Then she was left alone for a time, and in a few

minutes more was driving quickly towards the station. The keen, cold air, and dull grey light of the early morning, harmonized with her feelings, and did something to soothe and strengthen her. The silent drive over the wide-stretching and desolate-looking heath was the best preparation she could have had for the day that was before her. She felt, and was glad to feel, that she was not at all tired. Her meeting with Lady Ann was not of such a nature that she would wish to enter upon it, labouring under the disadvantage of physical exhaustion. Her sense of the importance of saving her strength for the interview made her force herself to eat and drink in London while she was waiting for the Norborough train. It also made her try to sleep in the railway carriage, but this attempt was soon given up; sleep was out of the question at present. She was successful, however, in keeping her mind inactive. She did not spend the journey in thinking over the events that had led to her marriage: her one thought was, "I shall soon be there." And the repetition of this thought seemed to make itself one with the rhythm of the train's motion.



CHAPTER XIII.



NORBOROUGH HALL AGAIN.

HE porter at Norborough station of course knew Janet, and, of course, wondered to see her. "Where to, miss?—ma'am, I should say," he said, as he took out Janet's bag. "Nowhere, at present, Ward. I will leave the bag here till I come back." There was no smile on her face or in her voice, such as young brides are wont to wear, and the man saw that she was in trouble.

Janet took the path across the fields that led to the Hall. Her heart beat quickly, and her hand shook as she rang the bell, but her courage did not fail. "Tell Lady Ann that I am here, and that I shall be glad to see her," she said to the servant who showed her into the library. She did not wait

long ; Janet's message, which was conveyed to Lady Ann in the form of " Mrs. Charles, my lady, in the library," warned Lady Ann that things had not gone as smoothly during the honeymoon as she could have wished ; but she determined quickly to put a good face upon the thing, and the thought did not enter into her mind that her object in bringing about the marriage would be thwarted. She would probably find Janet in tears, possibly in hysterics ; but this was hardly likely, considering the girl's good sense. However, she slipped a bottle of salts into the pocket of her apron, and was conscious that in doing so she was preparing for the worst, and giving a striking proof of the presence and strength of mind with which Providence had endowed her. She then swept down the broad staircase, the image of everything that was graceful, dignified, and tender. She was prepared to be very kind and compassionate to the dear girl. She entered the library, holding out both her hands, prepared to give Janet the most tender embrace. " My dear child," she said, in dolorous tones, " what brings you here ? "

But Janet drew back from the proffered embrace with a movement so haughty that Lady Ann was startled.

"We evidently shall not want the salts," she thought. But she was not in the least alarmed; she rather liked Janet the better for this touch of high spirit. She was, however, angered by Janet's first words, and the tone in which they were spoken.

"How long has your nephew been a drunkard, and how long have you known that he has been a drunkard?"

"My dear?"

"Answer me that question. You are bound in honour to answer me."

"It is a very, very great misfortune that he is—that he was at one time liable to attacks of that kind. But he has not for months, for years I may say, almost, been——"

"Lady Ann," interrupted Janet, "you are not answering my question. Are you afraid to answer it?"

"I am afraid of nothing, Janet," said Lady Ann, who saw that the question could not be evaded,

and who now determined to pursue a bold course. "Poor Charlie was overtaken by this misfortune about ten years ago ; he has always been most unhappy about it himself, and most anxious to overcome the temptation. For a long time he has successfully resisted it. We came here to this place, where he saw you ; he loved you with his whole heart, but he did not dare to speak to you. At last I guessed his secret, and spoke to him of it, and I then found that the poor fellow thought that his misfortune ought to prevent him from marrying. I knew that marriage with such a girl as you would save him, I know it will save him," she said vehemently, "from the power this temptation once had over him. I told him so ; he felt the truth of what I said, and confessed that your love would save him from all future intemperance. But he was most anxious that you should know nothing of his past trouble. 'Don't tell her,' he said, 'and I will never let her know.' You know what followed. He made you an offer, you accepted him, and I ventured to let poor Charlie have that all powerful motive for self-restraint which

your ignorance of his temptation would give him."

Janet listened attentively and quietly. She knew enough of her husband now to guess that, so far as Lady Ann's account of the matter attributed the initiative to him, it was incorrect. "Marston told me," she said, "that he and Mr. Forsyth were occupied entirely in looking after your nephew; his good resolutions were not strong enough, it appears, to take care of themselves for a single hour."

Lady Ann was deceived by the quietness of Janet's manner, and she replied in an affectionate tone—

"He will want neither Forsyth nor Marston, now that he has got you, my love."

Janet shook off the hand Lady Ann had placed upon her shoulder, and started from her seat.

"By heaven!" she exclaimed, with vehemence, "he shall want them both, so far as I am concerned. I will not be his keeper. I will never see him again of my own free will."

"You are mad, Janet," said Lady Ann. "You will regret having spoken to me in this way."

"I regret ever having spoken to you at all. I

regret ever seeing you. You let me ruin my whole life just to get a new keeper for a drunken——”

“Silence, child,” said Lady Ann. “Let me hear no more of this folly. ‘Ruined your whole life!’ You, a poor little country girl, married to a Leighton of Leighton Court, and you speak of being ruined because you find your new life not entirely to your liking. I am willing to take the entire responsibility of having brought about the marriage, and I say deliberately, that I never should have permitted it if I had not been sure that it was the most fortunate thing possible for you. A friendless, penniless, ignorant child received, affectionately received, into a distinguished family, as the wife of the head of that family. And you talk of being ruined!”

“You received me not as his wife, but as his keeper,” cried Janet, “and I will not be his keeper. I am penniless and ignorant, as you say, but I will not eat his bread, nor sleep under his roof. I will not do the work that I have been bought for, so I won’t put you to the expense of keeping me,” she added, with a discordant laugh.

She was leaving the room without saying any more, but Lady Ann put herself in front of the door. "You cannot do what you threaten, Janet," she said, loftily. "You think to revenge yourself by disgracing us by an open scandal. Thank God, it is out of your power! Your husband can compel you to live with him; he has done nothing which could give you a claim to a separation. Hundreds of women have suffered more than you, and have borne everything in silence and with dignity. You cannot leave him as you threaten, and it is right that you should know that you cannot!"

"I shall leave this house now; no one has any power, I believe," she said, wearily, "to make me stay here against my will. I don't understand much about it, but I suppose if you had a lawsuit about it, the lawyers would decide that I must live with him. But I won't live with him till the law does compel me, and, even after that, I will take care that everyone shall know why I refuse to live with him, and that I live with him for the same reason that a rat lives in a trap!"

The picture that Janet's words called up made

Lady Ann'quail. A separation and an allowance, and quiet hints about incompatibility of temper, would be better than the husband and wife living together on the terms that Janet described. And Lady Ann began to think that Janet would be as good as her word. After all, would it not, perhaps, be as well to let her go for a time? She would soon come to her senses, and find that to be a Leighton of Leighton Court was not a thing to be despised; and it would be a triumph almost worth the trouble Lady Ann was now enduring, to have this haughty young creature asking to be taken back into the noble family that she now affected to despise. All these considerations flashed rapidly through Lady Ann's mind; and to back them there was the practical difficulty of keeping Janet at the Hall against her will. It was quite easy to tell her that she was legally bound to live with her husband, but how was Lady Ann to assert her authority over an active young woman whose strength of will was equal to Lady Ann's own? She determined hastily to make what she inwardly called "one more appeal to Janet's better feelings,"

and then to let her go if go she would." "Janet," she began, "I have loved you like my own child; have you no care for us—for all we have suffered, and shall suffer, if you leave us like this? If you had a son afflicted like poor Charlie, would you not do anything and everything to save him? He has been like a son to me; I will love you like a daughter if you will be good to him."

While Lady Ann was speaking, a new thought came over Janet that made her tremble, and brought hot tears of shame and terror into her eyes. Lady Ann saw the tears, and interpreted them as a sign that Janet was yielding. They stood face to face. The elder woman put her hand on the girl's shoulder, and was not repulsed this time. "We have suffered such agonies all these years, Janet," whispered Lady Ann; "no one knows what we have suffered. His father and grandfather before him were the same. My child, we will welcome you like an angel from heaven if you will stay with us!"

Janet hardly heard her; her resolve was hardening that she would never live with her husband

again. "His father and grandfather before him," she repeated, mechanically. "Yes," said Lady Ann, who now threw her arms round Janet and whispered, "Say you will stay with him, my darling, and help us!"

"No, no; a thousand times no! I dare not. It is horrible! You said just now, "If you had a son." I will never have a son, nor any child to inherit this horrible curse!"

Lady Ann fell back into a chair, and Janet kissed her cold hands. But Lady Ann did not respond. If Janet would not yield, there should be no show of affection between them; and Janet's yielding, which just now seemed to Lady Ann so near, was farther off than ever.

"Go!" she said, in a hoarse voice. "His mother and I must bear our trouble alone. I am sorry we ever thought you would help us."

Then Janet went away, out into the wood, and down to the sea, and so home to the old house that she had left only three weeks before. She went to the kitchen door and opened it gently, and the next moment she was sobbing in Mrs. Barker's arms!



CHAPTER XIV.

THE OLD HOME AND A NEW ONE.

"Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds."



T was a relief to Janet to sob out her story to the good old servant. Mrs. Barker listened to everything and shared to the full Janet's grief and anger, but she decidedly and strongly opposed Janet's determination to leave her husband. " ' *For better and for worse* ' you took him," she said with particular emphasis on the prepositions. Janet only replied by repeating her determination never to see him again. The poor child had never known the strength of overmastering love for her husband. She had liked him, thought him kind and affectionate, and had been grateful for his affection. She imagined even

that she loved him, but her love had not been of the kind "that looks on tempests and is never shaken;" and the storm that had overtaken her had carried away in its fury such affection as she had once felt for her husband. She could not think of him now except as she last saw him in a drunken sleep, with discoloured face and half-closed eyes, and with Marston watching at his side. When Mrs. Barker talked to her of instances of wifely devotion, and told her of women who had gone through fire and water to serve men whom Mrs. Barker described as "drunkards and worse," Janet's self-reproach was greater than her anger. "I cannot bear what those poor women bore," she thought; "their love gave them strength. I never loved him as wives should love their husbands. I was very wicked to marry him, and now I am punished. O God! I am punished."

Her thoughts turned in this direction as good Mrs. Barker proceeded with her simple sermon. "What I say is," she concluded, "hev he a wife or hev he not? If he hev, he don't ought to be left alone, whatever he is, or whatever he's done!"

But Janet was immovable. Though the whole world should tell her that she ought to go back to her husband, she would not go back to him. She now told herself that she had done wrong in marrying him, and evil had come of that wrongdoing. The evil was quite inevitable, and she must endure the consequences of it to the end of her life, but it would be making bad worse to go back to her husband. She thought with a shudder of the luxuries and all the wealthy surroundings of her life as Mrs. Leighton ; if she accepted them now, it would be accepting the price of her own degradation. She would reject them all. She refused to fulfil all wifely duties, and she would also refuse every privilege she would have claimed as a wife. As far as in her lay, she would wash her hands of the marriage altogether ; she would not be beholden to the Leightons for a penny ; she would work for her own living, as she would have had to do, in case of her mother's death, if she had remained unmarried.

Work for her own living ! But what work ? That was a question that Janet had great difficulty

in answering. If she offered herself as a governess in a private family or school, would her services be accepted? In the first place, she knew very little except French; and she had seen enough of the world to be aware that a woman living apart from her husband, whatever were the circumstances of her separation, would not be likely to find many people willing to engage her as a governess. Could she wait in a shop, or be a telegraph clerk, or learn to cut ladies' hair and get engaged at Douglas's, or any of the other London hairdressers that employ women. The fact that the women in these employments are not ladies did not weigh much with her. "I daresay they are as good as I am," she said to herself, "and I must live."

She did not, of course, forget that she had 50*l.* a year of her own. The possession of that little fortune was the one ray of light that shone upon Janet's life at that time. It enabled her to wait, to keep Mrs. Barker with her, and, above all, it gave her the power to be her own mistress. Very soon after her arrival at Norborough, she wrote and told her story to her friend Margaret, and begged her

advice as to what she could do for a living. The reply was a letter from both Mr. and Mrs. Williams pressing Janet most warmly to come to them at Oakhurst at once. Margaret said she was sure if they talked it over together, they could think of something better for Janet to do than anything that had yet been suggested. So it was arranged that Janet should go to Oakhurst. Mrs. Barker remained at Norborough for a week or two, till the old house and the furniture were sold ; then she followed her mistress to the New Forest, and they felt that they had said a last good-bye to Norborough.

Mr. Williams was a very good friend to Janet, notwithstanding that he strongly disapproved of her determination to live apart from her husband, and that he found that she was quite immovable on the point.

“ Since you have written to ask our advice, Mrs. Leighton,” he said, “ I do not hesitate to say that I am most strongly of opinion that you ought to go back to your husband.” He forgot, till his wife reminded him, that it was not about returning

to her husband that Janet had asked their advice, but about what work she could do to support herself, as she would accept none of her husband's money. But Mr. Williams, thoroughly kind-hearted and helpful as he was, had a mind that rather despised details. Janet had certainly written to ask advice, and Mr. Williams was quite ready to give it on all subjects; it was a mere detail on what subject it was that Janet had wished to be advised. People who knew Mr. Williams well used to say that the way to ingratiate oneself with him was to ask him for his advice; he gave it in floods and torrents, but he was your friend for life. One of his best points was that he did not resent it if his advice was not taken. He had so happy a disposition that if the advisee succeeded in any undertaking, Mr. Williams was confident that it was because his advice had been followed. Whereas all failures were accounted for in a manner equally satisfactory to himself; the person who failed had not taken Mr. Williams's advice. Now that Janet was staying in his house, and had written before she came to ask advice, he found her a

charming companion. He advised her on every conceivable subject :—Where to get Stilton cheese ; how to supply herself with Welsh mutton ; what walks to take ; to go back to her husband ; to travel third-class and not to mind what people said ; not to get into debt ; not to part with Mrs. Barker ; what boot-laces wore the best ; who was the best tutor and the best coach at Cambridge ; what college to send her sons to ; where to spend the long vacation ; and finally, how to turn her knowledge of French to good account. On this last subject his advice was triumphant. Janet and Mrs. Williams had thought that it might be a good plan if Janet entered a training-college, and qualified herself to become the certificated mistress of a national school. If she did this, she could get 70*l.* or 80*l.* a year and a house, and might perhaps get appointed to the Oakhurst school which was then being built by Mr. Williams. She could live at Oakhurst very comfortably with Mrs. Barker on her salary plus her 50*l.* a year. But Mr. Williams could not see that this scheme had a single recommendation. “ Mrs. Leighton’s knowledge of

French would be completely thrown away in such an occupation." Finally, he wrote to his own publishers, pointing out the urgent necessity, in the interests of theological research, that English translations should be published at once of several volumes of French theology written by eminent Protestant *pasteurs*; and added that there was a lady now staying at his house, a first-rate translator, who would undertake to do the work on moderate terms. He enclosed a specimen of Janet's translation of a few pages of a work by M. de Pressensé, which he said he was sure would astonish Messrs. Parsons and Hitchcock by its vigour and fidelity. Janet was most grateful; the training-college scheme was put on one side, pending the receipt of Messrs. Parsons and Hitchcock's reply. It came at last, and was favourable; and in a few days Janet had agreed to translate for 150*l.* three ponderous tomes of French Protestant theology.

"How delightful!" exclaimed Janet, hugging her volumes. "How good you have been to me, Mr. Williams; I can never thank you enough!"

"Not at all. I can give you an order to read in the

library of the British Museum if you would like to do your work in London, or if you would like to do it here I could get you books of reference from the University Library. It wouldn't be the least trouble. I should simply write a note, and say, "Oakhurst Rectory, March 12.—My dear Elliot,—I shall be much obliged if you will take out of the University Library, in my name, so-and-so and so-and-so, and send them to the above address. Believe me, my dear Elliot, sincerely yours, Robert Williams.'"

Did we say Mr. Williams despised details? He did in most things, but when he once committed himself to a description in detail he left nothing to the imagination.

When Mrs. Williams and Janet were alone, the former suggested that the work would be a little dull. "It's a dreary subject, Janet," she said.

"O Margaret, that is nothing. I am so delighted to have the work; it won't be nearly so dull as cutting hair and fastening together sham chignons."

"That was a most absurd notion of yours, certainly."

"But I believe I should have been obliged to do it if it hadn't been for you and Mr. Williams," said Janet, kissing her friend.

Before Janet had left Norborough she had endured visits from her old friends there. Of course, her story, or some version of it, was in everybody's mouth before she had been four-and-twenty hours in the village. Mrs. Sedgely heard so many different accounts of the matter that she was fairly baffled. With the best intentions firmly to believe one version and regard all the others as "Norborough tales," she could not make the selection; so at last she persuaded herself that as an old friend she ought to call upon Janet. "After all," she reflected, "there's nothing like going to the fountain head." But she did not find Janet very communicative. "I am very unhappy, but I would rather not talk about it," was all that Mrs. Sedgely could obtain. So Mrs. Sedgely repaired next to Mrs. Barker, whom she might have compared, if she had wished to develop her simile of the fountain head, to the fountain's tap. When Mrs. Grey heard that Mrs. Sedgely had called, and had ascertained

that Janet refused to live with her husband, she too went to see Janet. She felt that the motherless girl had some claim upon her for affection, and for reproof, for Mrs. Grey strongly condemned Janet's conduct. Janet responded gratefully to Mrs. Grey's affection, and accepted the reproof with meekness.

"My dear Janet," said Mrs. Grey, "you ought to take the advice of your friends in this ; you are putting yourself quite in the wrong by staying here. Everyone says so. If you will go back to your husband, everyone's sympathy will be with you. But you shut yourself off from the pity we all feel for you in this misfortune by your present conduct."

"I cannot help it, Mrs. Grey ; it is very hard, but I cannot help it. I would rather have everyone against me than be against myself. I don't mean that I don't blame myself now. I do. But if I went back to him I should be selling myself, body and soul. I should be no better than those poor creatures in the streets. I should be much worse."

Mrs. Grey left Janet, but the door had hardly closed upon her before the clergyman, Mr. Double-

day, was announced. His counsel was identical with Mrs. Grey's. Then Mrs. Sedgely called again to back up what "dear Mrs. Grey" had said. Then Captain Macduff wrote a long letter in the same strain; and finally Mr. Broadley came down from London on purpose to give the same advice. From Mrs. Barker upwards everyone said, "Go back to your husband, whatever he is, however you may have been deceived." But she swore to herself, and declared to her counsellors, that she would never go back to him.

It was after receiving all these visits that Janet had written to Mrs. Williams; she could not endure her life in Norborough any longer. At Oakhurst it would be more tolerable to be alive than at Norborough, where no day passed without the irritating necessity of justifying or excusing herself to people who believed that no justification or excuse for her conduct could under any circumstances be found. Janet hardly knew how much this contest with the Norborians had exhausted her till she found that, for the first time since her troubles came upon her, she had a keen sense of pleasure

and relief, arising from the fact that Margaret thought her conduct right.

"It is such a rest, Margaret," she said, "that you understand it, and think I should be wrong to go back."

"Of course you have no legal right to separate yourself from him; but it seems to me that your moral right is plain. He married you under false pretences, as false as they would have been if he had had another wife living at the time. If this horrible propensity for drinking had come upon him after you were married, I should have thought that you ought to have borne everything rather than have left him. It would have been an unforeseen misfortune which you should have borne together. But the case is quite different now. He has wilfully deceived you; if you had known the truth about him, you never would have married him."

"You don't know how glad I am to hear you say this. I feel now that I am not alone; that I have a friend on whose arm I can lean. Dear Margaret, I shall think of you when I hear, 'I was

sick and ye visited me; I was in prison and ye came unto me.' ”

Janet did not establish herself in London with Mrs. Barker and her French theology without having an encounter with Lady Ann's lawyer. She first received a letter enclosing a cheque due to her “as per settlement,” and requiring her to join Mr. Leighton at Leighton Court. This she replied to by returning the cheque, and by saying that she entirely refused to live with Mr. Leighton, or to accept anything from him. “If any attempt is made to force me to live with him,” she wrote, “I will advertise in every way that is open to me the circumstances of my marriage. Everyone shall know that I am living with him against my will; that he is a drunkard, and that he married me under false pretences.” When she sent off this letter, she also wrote to Lady Ann Leighton, repeating the threat of giving the greatest possible publicity to the circumstances of her marriage if any attempt was made to force her to live with Mr. Leighton. And she concluded by saying that she was earning her own living, and would continue to do so, with-

out any pecuniary assistance from her husband's family. Lady Ann replied by imploring her not to disgrace the name she bore by performing menial work, or mixing with uncultivated people. She promised that no effort should be made to force her to return to her husband, although she expressed confidence that in time Janet's better feelings would prevail, and that she would return to him. In conclusion she begged Janet as a personal favour to accept an allowance of 500*l.* a year, to maintain her in that station of life to which it had pleased Mr. Leighton to call her. This offer was once more refused, and at last Janet was undisturbed in her new life in London.





CHAPTER XV.

NEW KNOWLEDGE AND NEW HAPPINESS.

"Would it were I had been false, not you,
I that am nothing, not you that are all :
I never the worse for a touch or two
On my speckled hide ; not you the pride
Of the day, my swan, that a first fleck's fall
On her wonder of white must unswan, undo."

.

"Thou art rash as fire to say

That she was false ; O, she was heavenly true !"



TIME, the great healer of sorrows, gradually restored Janet, if not to the perfect health of happiness, at least to the convalescence of tranquillity and resignation. She could never think of her marriage without a pang of the old grief, but the thought no longer made her hands tremble and her cheeks burn as it did when her sorrow was new. Her bitterness too towards those who had brought the marriage about

was assuaged. She had even at first felt less anger than disgust towards her husband, and now, so far as it was possible, she had forgiven Lady Ann. She recognised the intensity with which Lady Ann had desired to save her nephew from his hereditary vice ; with that end in view she had sacrificed her own life, and was ready to sacrifice the life of any other person. The disposition of her class to use people about them for their own ends was strongly developed in Lady Ann. She had no intention of injuring Janet, but simply of serving her nephew ; and if Janet was injured in the process, Lady Ann felt that it was an unfortunate, but after all, an unimportant accident. All this the perspective of a few years made clear to Janet, and she bore no malice or hatred in her heart towards the originator of her misfortunes.

There was one person, however, towards whom Janet was less charitably disposed. This was Forsyth. She now knew that the business of the ostensible secretary or tutor had been to prevent Charlie Leighton from drinking. Forsyth and Janet had been very good friends, and yet, knowing what

he did, he allowed her to marry Leighton without telling her a word. The excuse for Lady Ann was her devotion to her nephew. Forsyth had no excuse, not even that of not wishing to lose his salary, for he had thrown up his engagement before Janet's marriage. "I suppose he thought it was no business of his," thought Janet. "I wonder if he would think it was any business of his to save a child whom he saw playing with a loaded pistol." Marston, the butler, had said he would have told her himself, and prevented the marriage, if he had known of her ignorance. Mr. Forsyth must have known of it, and yet he had never spoken a word of warning to her. "It was cruel ; it was dastardly," was Janet's comment on Forsyth's share in her misfortunes.

Janet does not often speak of her troubles even to her oldest friend, Mrs. Williams, but she is speaking of them now, and especially of Forsyth's share in them, and those were her last words. It is now four years since Janet began her first translation. She has found it possible to live on her trade, and to live not unpleasantly. She has made herself a little

reputation among authors and publishers as a faithful and vigorous translator of French. She has splendid health, and that makes it easy to her to work long hours, and to work quickly. With all these advantages she gets enough work to live upon, for she makes on an average about 200*l.* a year ; not all out of translating theological books, her friends will be glad to hear. She gets now and then a military history, a scientific book, or a novel.

At the time of which we are speaking she had taken lodgings at Oakhurst for July, August, and September, in order to enjoy the lovely air and scenery of the New Forest, and to be near Mr. and Mrs. Williams. She and Margaret had arranged this, and they thought a delightful three months was before them. But the plan was not originated by Mr. Williams, and consequently he took no interest in it, and, in fact, so far disapproved of it that, shortly before Janet's arrival, he contracted an attack of rheumatic gout, for which he at first tried the waters at Buxton, but finally he determined that he must go to Kreuznach, and that Mrs. Williams

must of course go with him. So Janet was to be robbed of her holiday companion. It may be imagined that she was not at all consoled by hearing that Forsyth was to be in the Rectory during the absence of her friends.

"Why is he coming?" she said to Margaret; "he won't be able to take the services on Sunday."

"No; Robert has arranged that one of the curates from Lyndhurst will do that; but we stayed a day at Cambridge after we left Buxton, and Robert saw Mr. Forsyth, who said he was looking out for a quiet place to do some work in, in the long vacation. He wanted to find good scenery and a mathematical library together. Robert immediately suggested Oakhurst, and that he should use our library; and it was arranged that he should live at the Rectory while we are away. I was sorry about it, because I know you don't like him, but you can see as little of him as you wish."

"It isn't that I don't like him. I liked him very much when I knew him five years ago, but I shall always think he behaved abominably in not telling

me what he knew about Mr. Leighton; he had nothing to lose in telling me; two words from him might have saved me all this misery. However, as you say, I needn't see much of him, and if I like I could leave my lodgings here, and go to Stonycross, or over to the Isle of Wight."

Janet was walking up and down the room, vexed to the heart at the prospect of having Forsyth for her only neighbour; and after a minute's silence, Mr. Williams said, "Don't you think he imagined that you did know about Mr. Leighton?"

"No; impossible. How could he think that I knew, when every precaution was taken to keep it secret?"

It was then that she added, "It was cruel; it was dastardly." And Margaret had nothing to say in contradiction.

Forsyth was to arrive that evening, and Janet declined dining at the Rectory to meet him. "I shall bow to him when I see him, of course," she said, "but the less I see him the better I shall like it. Don't say anything about it to Mr. Williams; he is so good to me that it will make him quite unhappy."

While Mr. and Mrs. Williams and Forsyth were waiting in the drawing-room before dinner, the Rector said to his wife, "Where's Mrs. Leighton, my dear? isn't she dining with us to-day?"

"No, she couldn't come, Robert; she dined early."

"How extraordinarily foolish. How any rational being can dine alone in lodgings in the middle of the day, when——"

"Dinner's on the table, sir."

"Eh? yes. Forsyth, will you give your arm to my wife?" and he hobbled in after them.

"Is Mrs. Leighton, Charlie Leighton's wife, staying here?" asked Forsyth of Mrs. Williams on their way to the dining-room.

"Yes; she came here to spend the summer near us, so it is all the more aggravating that we have to go away."

"Where is Leighton?" asked Forsyth, in a tone which conveyed just a tinge of amusement, and the least suspicion of disgust.

But Mrs. Williams was equal to the occasion. The way in which she said "I don't know," was

sufficiently expressive to make Forsyth change the conversation. After that they talked about the weather. But this interesting topic was not engrossing enough to prevent Forsyth thinking about what he had just heard of Mrs. Leighton. "She must be thoroughly bad," he thought; "I suppose she married poor Leighton for his money, secured a settlement on good terms, and has lived happily ever afterwards, without troubling herself even to know where her husband is." He thereupon formed some rapid generalisations as to the absence of moral sense in women; what was called moral sense was, so far as the female mind was concerned, a pure conventionalism. After all, he concluded, it was only what was to be expected, that the physical and intellectual inferiority of women should be accompanied by a corresponding moral inferiority.

It ought to be remembered in Forsyth's defence that he had not taken a merely philosophical interest in Janet's marriage. What had been her special attraction to him was her frank honesty, courage, and unconventionality of thought and manners. He now believed himself to have been

thoroughly deceived in his estimate of her; and his condemnation was bitter and sweeping in proportion to the strength of his previous admiration.

Mrs. Williams, also, had been thinking of Janet while she talked to Forsyth about the weather. And her thinking was certainly more to the point than his. "I am almost certain," she thought, "that he believes Janet married, knowing her husband to be a drunkard." And she resolved that she would invite him after dinner to walk with her to see the view over the forest from the end of the garden, and that she would then find out what grounds there were for the mutual dislike that certainly existed between him and Janet. Mrs. Williams had no talent for beating about the bush, so when the Rector was dozing on the sofa after dinner, and Forsyth was strolling with her into the garden, she said—

"I wanted you to come out that I might speak to you about Mrs. Leighton. I fancy you think ill of her on account of her marriage, but I think you ought to know that she thinks very bitterly of you for not having prevented the marriage."

"How could I have prevented it? I was not her guardian."

"'Am I my brother's keeper?'" said Mrs. Williams, sadly. "In this case I should answer 'yes' to that question. You were the only person who knew that Mr. Leighton was a hopeless drunkard, who was not strongly interested in bringing about the marriage, and one word from you might have stopped the marriage and all the frightful calamity that followed."

"She knew it herself—she knew it herself," he broke in eagerly. "She married him with her eyes open."

"You are wrong ; she knew nothing."

An expression of sharp pain came into Forsyth's face. They were standing still now, opposite each other, on the gravel walk.

"She knew nothing," continued she, "till about a fortnight after her marriage, and then she found the man she had married in a helpless state of drunkenness, lying on the floor. She thought he was in a fit ; and Marston, the butler, was the man who told her that he was drunk, and that he had been a hopeless

drunkard from the time he was a boy. A word from you might have saved her."

Forsyth's face was as white as ashes now.

"Are you certain it is true?" he said, almost in a whisper. "I thought she had been told. I thought—— I was a damned fool, I ought to have known that she was as pure as snow, and that Lady Ann was lying."

"Yes, it is true enough. Her life since her marriage is proof of that. She left her husband immediately she knew the truth about him; and since that she has worked hard to maintain herself, for she would never accept a farthing of the Leightons' money."

"I ought to have known," he repeated; and then, not in self-defence, but by way of explanation of the facts, he told her in a hurried, broken voice of the interview he had had with Lady Ann, when she assured him that she herself had told Janet the whole truth about Charlie Leighton.

"I went to her like a fool," he said, "and showed her my hand. I said that either she or I should tell Miss Doncaster that her nephew was a hopeless

drunkard ; and she put me off with a lie. I can hear her and see her now, with her keen, piercing eyes looking full at me. ' I told her myself ten days before the engagement took place.' And I believed her. An idiot might have had more sense."

" You have both been deceived by that unscrupulous woman. But don't be too hard on yourself for having been cheated by her. I am sure Janet will be happier when she knows the truth about you : she will be happier when she knows that you tried to save her."

Forsyth only gave a sort of groan in reply ; and Mrs. Williams went on :

" Only this morning she was speaking of you, and she used some very hard words about you. She said you were cruel and cowardly not to have warned her ; and now I shall go to her and say, ' You were quite wrong, he is not cruel, he is not cowardly. He tried to save you, and would have saved you, if he hadn't been deceived by that bad woman.' And then Janet will be much happier ; she will have lost an enemy and found a friend in his place."

Mrs. Williams's soft, monotonous voice and her words of comfort were very soothing to Forsyth. He did not reply, and she continued :

"And you have gained something, too—a great deal, I think. Half an hour ago you thought Janet was a coarse, selfish, sordid woman. Now, you know her as she is—pure and noble and true-hearted. Isn't that worth something? You thought worse of all women for her sake, and now you will think better of all women for her sake. And that is a great gain for you. You and she were friends once; you will be friends again, and neighbours now."

"Will you see her to-night, at once, and ask her to try to forgive me? But tell her I don't forgive myself; I never shall. I ought to have known that she was true, and that Lady Ann was lying."

"Yes, I will see her at once if you wish it. You won't come with me?"

"No. Let her know the truth before we see each other again."

"Go in to Mr. Williams, then, and tell him I have gone to see Mrs. Leighton, and shall be back in half an hour. No, stay! I will tell him myself,"

she said, with a quick perception that half an hour's solitude would be more congenial to Forsyth at that moment than companionship of any kind.

So she left him alone in the dim garden, looking over the grey, wide-stretching forest. The gloomy, mysterious beauty of the scene and the hour matched well with the mixed feelings of grief and gladness with which his new knowledge had filled him. It *was* a great gain to know that Janet had been true ; but then came the pang that he ought to have always known her truth, and that at the critical moment of her life he had withheld from her the knowledge that would have saved her. Notwithstanding his grief and anger and self-reproach, he was almost frightened to discover that he was profoundly happy. It was so much more bearable to blame himself than to blame her. Even the knowledge of all that Janet had suffered could not banish his delight in regaining his old faith in her. "Better, much better," he thought, "that I should have been a fool than that she should be what I thought her till to-day." Then he blamed himself anew for being happy while she was enduring

so much unhappiness. He told himself that his blundering had brought desolation on her life ; and he swore that if there was any service he could do in reparation for the injury he had brought upon her, she had a claim upon him which he could never pay. He would always feel himself in her debt. He had no thought of being in love with her ; his thoughts didn't run in that groove. The fact that overshadowed all other facts in his mind was that he had thought her false and that she was " heavenly true."





CHAPTER XVI.

FRIENDS AGAIN.



ANET was not so fortunate as Forsyth. The new knowledge which Margaret brought her of Forsyth's attempt to prevent her marriage brought no rush of the joy of renewed confidence in a sometime hero. Forsyth had never been more to Janet than a pleasant companion, so she had nothing very great either to gain or to lose in his fidelity or supposed treachery.

"Yes, I suppose I am glad of it," she said sadly in reply to Margaret's question. "Of course, it makes me like him better; but then it makes me like Lady Ann worse, which is quite unnecessary."

"He is very distressed, and begged me to tell you, even if you forgive him, he will never forgive himself for having believed that horrid woman."

"That is nonsense," said Janet, almost pettishly. "Forgiveness has nothing to do with it. I have nothing to forgive him. I do hope he won't say anything like that to me. I ought to be very much obliged to him for having spoken to Lady Ann at all about it. It is no fault of his that he thought she was telling the truth when she wasn't."

"At any rate, you will be friends now, and you won't mind his being at the Rectory while we are away."

"Yes, we shall be friends, of course. The idea of our being anything else has its ludicrous side, as we shall be the only people in Oakhurst who aren't charcoal-burners. Don't you remember the story of the two men living together alone in a lighthouse, who had a quarrel, and didn't speak to each other for fourteen years?"

"I shall be much happier about you when I'm at Kreuznach to think that I have left you and Mr. Forsyth at least on speaking terms. Good night."

Janet made the best to Mrs. Williams of the prospect of enjoying the companionship of Forsyth, but she was sincerely sorry that he had invaded the

solitude of Oakhurst. "I shall always be meeting him," she thought, "and I shall never see him without being reminded of everything that I would rather not be reminded of." But she consoled herself that she had a refuge in returning to London in case she disliked Oakhurst because Forsyth was in it.

Early the next morning, Forsyth came to see her.

"Mrs. Williams tells me," he said, "that I mustn't mention the word 'forgiveness' to you. But you must let me tell you that what I blame myself for is, that I ever believed you capable of anything base. I had known you, and I ought to have disbelieved an angel from heaven, if one came to me and said you were capable of marrying a drunkard for his money. The ease with which I was gulled by Lady Ann's story is what enrages me with myself. I ought to have known you better."

"Don't blame yourself any more. You had every reason for believing her."

"No; I can't admit that. But even though you may think me selfish to be glad while you are

suffering, it makes me very happy to know that you are quite free from blame, that you are the pure white soul I always ought to have known you were."

Janet was deeply touched by the feeling with which he spoke. She felt that he was much more generous to her than she had been to him. Had she not blamed him unjustly too? And when she had discovered her mistake, she had been very niggardly in doling out a return of friendship and confidence.

"You are very generous to me," she said. "I blamed you when you deserved no blame; so we have both been mistaken about each other."

"But I had no excuse."

"As much as I, or more. But I can see that we might argue on this point for an hour without coming to an agreement. So shall we agree each to cancel our own mistake? I will think no more of mine, if you will think no more of yours?"

"I will say no more of it at any rate, and I shall be very glad to try to make you forget it."

"Thanks."

Janet dined at the Rectory on the evening of that

day. And somehow, all her reasons for disliking and avoiding Forsyth vanished, and were put among the things that are forgotten. He was as pleasant to talk to and to listen to as of old. Pleasanter perhaps. For Janet's own life was fuller of interests and of knowledge than of old, and her character too had been strengthened by the trouble that she had endured, and by her successful efforts to be self-dependent. To learn and labour truly to get one's own living is a part of one's duty to one's neighbour that is too often kept by young ladies in the seclusion of the Prayer Book. And Janet had acquired a great deal besides mere pounds, shillings, and pence by her self-supporting industry.

Mrs. Williams was delighted with the prospect of the complete friendliness which seemed likely to be established between Janet and Forsyth. "You two," she said to Janet, "will be on a kind of desert island here, so you may really dispense with some of the ordinary *etiquette* of society. You must have walks together, and see more of each other than you ordinarily would if you were in a less desolate position."

The Rector gave similar advice to Forsyth.

"Mrs. Leighton knows her way about this part of the forest. She will take you to Mark Ash and Bramble Hill, and all the best walks. Of course you won't mind walking with her occasionally. There is really no one here who could show you the forest better."

The Rector and his wife left Oakhurst the next day. As they drove away Mrs. Williams said that she was sure Janet and Forsyth would be capital friends; it would be much better for them both than being absolutely without companionship.

"I hope they won't fall in love with each other," said the Rector.

"There's not the smallest chance of it, Robert," replied Mrs. Williams, with great emphasis. But she was thinking more of Janet than of Forsyth.





CHAPTER XVII.

FOREST WALKS.

"In a life like mine,

A fortnight filled with bliss is long and much."



All novel-readers will know, the Rector was right and his wife was wrong. When a young man and a young woman, mutually attractive by similarity of mental attitude and aims and hopes, and mutually attractive, too, by the dissimilarity of their previous experience and surroundings, are brought a great deal together, it often happens that mutual attraction crystallises into love.

Janet and Forsyth were together every day. They were each occupied in the morning, Janet with her translations, Forsyth with his mathematics. About two o'clock Forsyth generally

brought her the Rectory "Times," and asked if she would walk with him in the afternoon. These walks made them very intimate. There was an irresistible charm in the forest. It suited all moods. It was harmonious to every phase of feeling. Individually, the mighty oaks and beeches were full of character. They were to Janet tried and trusty friends; she began to feel for them what her Northborough life had taught her to feel for the sea. But it was not in their individual character that they had their greatest charm. There was a high ridge not far from Janet's lodging where, looking north, south, east, and west, the forest lay stretched, a splendid sea of trees. Far away, too, looking east, lay a bit of real sea—Southampton Water—a bright white line in the morning sun; and then, looking south, was the sea again, with the dim outline of the cliffs of the Isle of Wight beyond. This was a place that Janet always made a kind of out-of-doors home of when she was at Oakhurst. "It's good to be alive" often rose to her lips when first she returned to this place after an absence.

"Mr. Williams says I have a craze for this place,"

she said to Forsyth. "It makes me think of the story of Linnæus, when first he saw an English common covered with yellow gorse in blossom ; he fell down on his knees to thank God he had lived to see it. If that were the way nowadays to show that one is very glad, I should fall on my knees every time I come here, and thank God for letting me see it again !"

Janet was Forsyth's guide through the mazes of the forest. Their delight was to determine on some spot as their destination, and then to leave the road and all the beaten tracks, and try to guide themselves by the sun and the light of their inner consciousness, to their goal. Of course they often missed the mark, or were turned out of their course by an impassable bog ; or, better still, they passed over an impassable bog, and reached their goal victoriously. But such victories were dearly bought. They always excited Mrs. Barker's disgust. "Well, 'm ; you have bin in the slush," she would say to Janet. And talking the matter over with the cook at the Rectory, she would say, "It du surprise me, the pleasure gentlefolks take in gettin' into slush.

However, Mrs. Leighton olwast was the same, olwast ! " She wished it to be understood that Janet did not get into slush to please anyone but herself ; there would be something undignified, Mrs. Barker felt, in a lady going into slush for any other reason.

It was in these walks together in the long summer afternoons that the friendship between the two companions changed gradually and imperceptibly, so far as Janet was concerned, into love. Forsyth was in love with a sort of ideal Janet from the moment he had heard Mrs. Williams' explanation of her marriage. He now loved, and knew that he loved, the real Janet with a depth of feeling that made the whole world seem new to him. He did not imagine, he did not dare to think, that Janet returned his love. Of course he recognised that their lives were inevitably separated, and that all hope, in the ordinary sense of a lover's hope, was an impossibility for him. This he recognised fully and completely, and he also recognised that he could never honourably say a word that would hint his love to her. This he swore to himself that he

would never do. He would not add a feather's weight to the troubles of her life, but if he could he would make her feel that she had in him a friend to lean upon, one who would be glad to serve her in any way in which time, money, and devotion could be of service. He often tried to think of ways in which he could tell her, without implying his love, that he would be happier than he had ever been in his life, if she would say that she would, in any trouble or anxiety, rely on him to be her devoted friend. He sometimes felt that it was not quite in the character of mere friendship to be so much with her. He even, with heroic courage, sent a note to her in the afternoon one day to say that he had so many letters to write he could not walk. But it may be easily imagined that he found plenty of excuses for not repeating this drastic remedy. Was it not a fact that sometimes Janet might come across a beggar or a pedlar in some lonely forest glade? It was not right that she should be alone, and there was no one else to walk with her but himself; therefore he was obliged to go with her every afternoon. This kind of reasoning seemed per-

fectly conclusive to Forsyth in his present temper. And besides, had not Janet said, with the most divine frankness, that she enjoyed walking with him much more than walking alone? And was it not one of the clearest offices of friendship to give her this simple pleasure? And finally, dismissing all sham reasons, he told himself that the present was probably the only time in their lives when they would have the chance of being much together, and he would not throw away the opportunity of enjoying the rare and intense happiness Janet's companionship gave him. The remembrance of these days spent together in the forest would always remain as the best and happiest of his life. And so, with some exceptions which became rarer as the weeks passed by, Forsyth was frank with himself. He loved Janet; he knew that he loved her, he was not afraid of confessing the fact to himself. He did not regret his love, nor strive against it; but he was firm in his resolve not to betray it either to her or to anyone else, and equally firm in another resolve, which was certainly antagonistic to the first--to be with her and walk with her every day as long as it

was his fortune to be her neighbour in the forest. Though the two resolutions were antagonistic, Forsyth had strength and to spare to keep them both. And kept they both would have been if Janet had had more knowledge of herself and of the passion of love. But of her own capacity for love, or of awakening love in another, Janet was much more ignorant than many children. She loved Forsyth, but she did not know that she loved him. She only knew that she was very happy—happier than she ever could remember being before. She asked herself no questions, attempted no self-concealments; she accepted her present happiness as she accepted the sunshine and the flowers, without analysing its source, or asking where it was leading her. "The forest is so magnificent this year," she wrote to Margaret, "I never remember to have seen it so beautiful; the flowers are much finer than they have been in any other summer I have spent at Oakhurst. I am often astonished to find I can enjoy Oakhurst without you; but Mr. Forsyth is very kind, he walks with me every day, and so I am not at all lonely."

“The world is very beautiful. I am very happy!” These words express the only definite feelings that growing love awakened in Janet. If she had recognised that she loved Forsyth, she would have shown her courage by running away. Discretion is assuredly the better part of valour in such cases. But she recognised nothing of the kind. Forewarned is forearmed, in love as in other matters; and when the shock came that revealed Janet’s love to herself she was quite unprepared for it, and it shook the very foundations of her nature.





CHAPTER XVIII.

JANET'S TOWER.

"For once when nobody was by her
This foolish child would play with fire ;
And long before her mother came
Her pinafore was all in flame."



IN a distant part of the high ridge whence the forest could be seen stretching on all sides, with delicate indications in the east and south of the sea in the far distance, was a quaint old brick tower. It was supposed to have been built as a refuge from storms for travellers journeying on horseback between Southampton and Salisbury. But if so, it was of an unaccountable shape for its purpose. For it was more like a lighthouse in form than the mere

shed which would have provided a shelter for man and horse. Its height made it a conspicuous object, and it might have served to guide the traveller to the right track as well as to shelter him in case of a storm. The Rector and his wife had christened it "Janet's tower," because of Janet's affection for the view it commanded. There was a rickety old staircase to the top of it, and Janet seldom passed it without going to the top, wherefrom, between the clumsy battlements, she could look down on all the glories of the forest. Forsyth laughed at the constancy with which she always climbed the old stairs, and protested that the view was just as fine as seen from the ground ; and Janet confessed herself so far a cockney and a Philistine, that even if the view were exactly the same she liked it better from the top of the tower than from the ground. "For one thing," she added, "when we are at the top of the tower the dear old ugly thing is obliterated, and we see nothing but the forest, whereas when we are on the ground the tower is always getting in our way and preventing us from seeing just what we want to see."

At the end of a sultry July day, Janet and Forsyth stood together at the top of the tower, watching the tranquil beauty of the sunset sky. Janet leaned forward between the high battlements, resting on her arms. Her hands were playing idly with an old Indian fan which had been her mother's ; the heat had induced her to hang it on her girdle, and to make it perform an unwonted day's work. She had altered the current of its life ; it was about to retaliate by altering the current of hers. As she listlessly swung it round, it escaped from her hand and fell, not, however, to the ground. It rested on the flat top of a large buttress that supported the tower on its western side. " How tiresome ! " exclaimed Janet, peering down after it. It was about five-and-twenty feet from the ground, and perhaps as many from the top of the tower. There it lay securely on a little plateau of brickwork. " It was my mother's, and I fancy my grandmother's before that," added Janet, explanatorily ; she did not wish Forsyth to think she would spend much regret over the loss of a fan *quà* fan. Forsyth came to the place where Janet had been standing, and looked down.

"I believe I can get it," he said, as much to himself as to Janet.

"Oh no, it is quite impossible."

"Yes, I can get it. Come here and look. First of all, I should hang on by my hands from the edge here. Then I can see a number of places where the bricks have worn hollow or project a little, where I could get hand and foot hold. Look, there are three there that look as if they had been put in on purpose for stepping-stones. Then I should reach the buttress, secure the fan, and come down the buttress."

"What a wild notion!" said Janet, who did not at all believe that he was seriously meaning to carry it out.

"Not a bit," he insisted, taking off his coat that he might have the better use of his arms in the descent.

At that moment the mist that had hidden Janet's love from herself vanished. A rush of intense mental pain told her that she loved Forsyth, that he was more to her than all the world besides.

She sprang to the place between the battlements

from which he would have descended ; her eyes were lit as if with fire. " You shall not do it. I would die rather than let you. I don't care for that trumpery fan, I care for you."

Their eyes met. There was a new meaning in them ; there was a consciousness that there existed between the two friends something inexpressibly precious which they dared not avow. Perhaps for twenty seconds they stood looking in each other's eyes. The time seemed to each as full of new and wonderful experience as half a life-time of ordinary living. Then Forsyth spoke, almost in a whisper, " Let us go home, I will do what you wish." The reaction of relief after the intense excitement of the last few moments seemed almost to have paralysed Janet. She could not answer Forsyth ; she followed him down the old staircase, feeling that she was in a dream-world ; that what had just happened, with all the strange self-consciousness it had brought, was not real, but was like the events in a dream. But for the necessity of walking, this dream might have lasted for hours, but the physical exercise awakened her from her mental trance.

And once awakened, there was no more chance of falling into the dream again, for the waking was full of pain. What had she said, what had she done? She, a married woman, had as good as told Forsyth she loved him; in one wild moment of insensate folly she had disgraced herself, and for what object? Certainly, for one which she could have accomplished at one hundredth part of the cost. She did not deceive herself now; she confessed in silence that she would deliberately choose to tell him that he possessed her unsought love, rather than let him risk his life for a ridiculously inadequate object. But then her confession had been so unnecessary, so superfluous; she could have prevented him risking his life for the sake of a toy by the merest appeal to his common sense. That was the sting of her self-accusations. She had carried her purpose, but at a cost that was totally unnecessary and uncalled for. What must he think of her now? These thoughts overwhelmed her with shame and regret. The tears started to her eyes; she had much difficulty to prevent them falling.

Janet and Forsyth were a strange contrast to one another as they walked in silence towards Oakhurst. Her words had been a revelation to him full of the most intense joy. He walked erect, with his head thrown back a little; the light of a new and a great happiness in his eyes; there was a smile almost of triumph on his lips. Her head was downcast, her eyes were full of tears, her very finger-tips tingled with shame and self-reproach. There was some self-congratulation in Forsyth's happiness. He had seen that Janet's confession had escaped from her in a moment of great excitement, that it was as great a surprise to herself as to him, and he was very glad that at that moment of great joy on his part, he had not been betrayed into a declaration of his own love. It would have been taking an unfair advantage of her to have held her to words that were obviously uttered under great excitement, and to have made them the excuse for pouring out his own love. He hoped he had acted in a way that she would think generous. "She must know," he thought, "that I love her, and she will be glad that I didn't take advan-

tage of an unguarded expression to urge my love upon her."

And so they walked on till they reached the little wicket gate where they had to part; Janet to her lodgings, Forsyth to the Rectory. Janet felt that she was compelled to break the spell of silence that had bound them since they left the tower. It would need a great mastery over herself, but she must speak. She got as far as saying, "I am very sorry," and there stopped short; she could not repeat what she was sorry for. She had not yet dared to look him in the face, but now when she had tried to speak, and no answer from him broke the dead stillness of the evening, she thought with a fresh pang, "Is he so very angry?" and looked up into his face. She read there in the light of his eyes, in the tender expression of happiness round his mouth, the immeasurable content with which he was filled. She read there the truth, that he loved her, that he had loved her for a long time. Suddenly, as the knowledge of this truth came upon her, she seemed to throw off the fear, and shame, and misery that had oppressed her during the walk

from the tower, as she would have thrown down a heavy weight, the weary burden of which proved to be useless and uncalled for. What a relief to be without it! What freedom and delight in mere living and moving without the detested burden! The remembrance of her last words, so recently uttered, came across her mind like a ghost—"I am very sorry." How unreal and unnatural the words seemed now, and how far off, removed beyond the birth of a new and overwhelming emotion. Forsyth took her hand in both of his. "If you are sorry," he said gently, "I suppose I ought to be sorry too. But I can't be sorry; I am intensely happy, happier than I ever imagined it possible to be."

They stood together for a few moments, hand in hand like two children, and then parted in silence.

The whole world seemed a new place to Janet; the flood of sudden unexpected happiness had carried away with it all the landmarks of her life. When she reached her lodging, she could not help feeling it was strange that everything was exactly as she had left it a few hours before. The horsehair

sofa, the china shepherd and shepherdess, the painted vases on the mantelpiece, the crochet mats, were in their accustomed places in all their unfading ugliness. It would not have appeared strange to Janet if the ugliness and commonplaceness of her surroundings had faded away, or had been suddenly changed into something harmonious with the new happiness of her inward life. Janet caught herself wondering that her room was as unbeautiful as ever, and that Mrs. Barker made as much noise as usual in putting out the little supper she had prepared for her mistress. "Sars-a-mind," said Mrs. Barker, when after supper Janet said she didn't want any candles lighted; "you'll fare lonely, 'm, settin' in the dark."

But Janet felt that her casement window, with the sight of the pale moonlight streaming over the wide-stretching forest, was the only place where she could be at rest that evening. The two candles stuck up in green glass candlesticks, the horsehair sofa and the crochet mats, should, for these first wonderful hours of happiness, be kept in the background. She would see nothing but what was

serene and beautiful, nothing but what was in harmony with the depth of the new joy with which she was filled. No regret, no sense of incompleteness, no anxiety troubled her. Her happiness was unbroken by any care for the future or the past ; she neither looked before nor after, she was satisfied with the bliss of the present moment ; she loved and was beloved. She sat on a footstool at the casement with her head leaning against the side of the window-frame, the moonlight bathing her in its pale light. How long she sat at the casement she did not know. She was too happy to sleep ; she would have felt it was a kind of waste to sleep through any part of her first hours of joy, and so she sat on and on, conscious of nothing but that she was very happy, and that the world (her world was only the forest and the moonlight) was beautiful.





CHAPTER XIX.

LEAVING OAKHURST.

"Yet I will but say what mere friends say,
Or only a thought stronger ;
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
Or so very little longer!"



RS. BARKER had gone to bed an hour and a half later than usual, in great anxiety about Janet. It must not be supposed that she had been anything but miserable ever since the Rector and his wife left Oakhurst and the daily walks and talks of Forsyth with her mistress began. She was certain that their being so much together would come to no good ; and there was no human being in Oakhurst to whom she dared breathe her anxiety. She had abjured the society of the Rectory servants since she found

that she was in danger of hearing facetious remarks from them about the growing intimacy between Forsyth and her mistress. She tried the effect on Janet of repeating more than once a well-worn story of the stinging reproof she had once given to a married lady at Norborough, who had come into her cottage to enquire whether she had seen Captain This or Major That pass her door? "And I looked at her, and I said, 'Noo, m'a'm, I hain't seen noo min; I never see noo min, save po'r Barker.' " But somehow Mrs Barker saw that her story missed fire. Janet had heard her story at intervals ever since she was five years old, and no amount of additional emphasis on Mrs. Barker's part in telling it could revivify the dry bones of this very old friend. What consoled Mrs. Barker was her great trust and belief in Janet, and a firm conviction at the same time that "her young lady" was quite different to all other young ladies, and therefore conduct which would be downright scandalous in anyone else was only a little thoughtless in Janet. She had another source of consolation besides. In ladies and gentlemen, she firmly believed, the first symptom of being

in love was a falling off in appetite. "I *du* like to see her enjoy her victuals," Mrs. Barker would say to herself; and even this evening, when Janet returned from the tower, the uneasiness which her old servant would have felt on account of her having been out with Forsyth longer than was customary was temporarily stilled by the fact that she ate her supper as usual. All Mrs. Barker's fears, however, were renewed by Janet's wish to spend the evening with no light but that of the moon. She made an excuse for going into the room about an hour after the supper had been taken away, and noticed, almost with terror, that Janet did not seem to be aware of her entrance. The old servant cast many a keen and anxious look at Janet's face of radiant, tranquil happiness; the moonlight fell directly on her face, and it was not difficult for an acute observer to see in the brow and eyes, and in the slightly parted lips, the traces of recent and powerful emotion. That the emotion was evidently one of joy added to Mrs. Barker's fears. Why was Miss Janet so strange this evening? Why was her face so beaming, and her smile so sweet? As often as Mrs. Barker asked her-

self these questions, the only possible answers that sprang to her mind made her declare that she ought to be ashamed of herself to have any such thoughts about her dear young lady. At last, after prowling about the stairs and Janet's bedroom for a long time, she went to bed, feeling very wretched. After an hour or two of sleep she woke, with her sense of uneasiness and alarm stronger than ever. She listened. The little house was perfectly still; the moon was low but still brilliant; the sky had that intense dark blue which it wears just before dawn. Mrs. Barker threw a shawl over her, and crept to the door of Janet's bedroom and listened. Everything was perfectly still. She turned the handle very gently, fearing she might awaken her darling. But the room was empty; the little white bed had not been slept upon. She turned almost sick with a terror which she would not name to herself. She then went on to the sitting-room. How her heart leapt with the relief from her worse suspicions when she saw Janet still sitting where she had left her by the window. But her old fears returned directly the first impulse of relief had left her.

"Mrs. Barker!" said Janet, in a low voice of surprise.

"Come, my dear," said the old woman, almost crying, "you don't ought to be here—you don't indeed. If your dear ma——"

"I am so happy," said Janet.

"Miss Janet, you don't ought to be happy. You haven't got nothing, nor done nothing, as ought to make your ma's daughter happy."

"I've not done anything to make me unhappy, nor mamma either," said Janet, in a low voice.

"Thank God for it, then; it's no thanks to him." And she pointed with a gesture of contempt towards the Rectory.

"Mrs. Barker," exclaimed Janet, angrily, "how dare you speak like that?"

"If your ma was alive, I should never 'a spoke at all, but if anything was to happen to you——" And Mrs. Barker broke into sobs.

"There is no fear at all of what you are thinking about."

Then Mrs. Barker, in the midst of her sobs, took hold of Janet's hand and kissed it; and they stood

together a few moments in silence, and Janet thought, "There is fear ; not exactly in the way she thinks, but there is fear. I daren't go on staying here ; I daren't see him every day and love him and let him love me. If I did all women would be thought more slightly of for my sake ; good women would think of me with grief and shame ; it is the women like me who make women's lives more difficult, and make it harder for women to be trusted." And then she thought, "No, it is not the women like me, for I will not be weak. I will leave this place, and not see him any more."

"There is no fear," she repeated slowly, "of what you were thinking of, but there is fear—of another kind. We will go back to London, Mrs. Barker ; we have been here too long."

"We could go away to-morrow, m'a'm."

"No, not to-morrow," said Janet, tremulously ; "I must have more time than that. But we could leave the next day."

Then the pain of giving up all her newly-found sweetness and joy overcame her, and, falling upon her old friend's neck, she wept bitterly.

Mrs. Barker led her gently away, and soothed her with quiet gestures of love and trustfulness, in strange contrast with her usual garrulousness. She did not leave Janet till she had seen her laid in the little bed.

The morning found Janet's resolution to leave Oakhurst unshaken, and some of the tranquil happiness of her moonlight watch restored. Although she must leave Forsyth, and never perhaps be with him again, yet it was a great addition to her stock of happiness to have the remembrance of these two months together ; to know that he loved her, that she loved him, and that they were separated, not because they no longer loved and trusted one another, but because inevitable circumstances made the perfection of their love impossible. Her life had been so gray and sombre that she welcomed the breaking out of the sunlight with eager joy, and did not quarrel with its brilliancy because some clouds were still left as black and stormy as ever.

There was one question which Janet found it difficult to answer. Should she see Forsyth again, just once more, for the last time? It would be

difficult to say "good-bye" without saying a great deal more. But there was a sort of absurdity and affectation in running away, as it were, without seeing him. But Janet was saved much perplexity on this point by Forsyth himself. After all her arrangements were made for leaving Oakhurst the next morning, Mrs. Barker grimly put into her hand this note from Forsyth:—

"I shall not see you for two or three days. I have to go to Southampton, to meet some of my people who are coming over from Havre.—Yours, A. F."

The events of the previous evening had moved Forsyth as deeply as they had moved Janet. He had been happy, but his happiness had been troubled. He told himself that he wanted a day or two to collect himself and think over what had happened. Then remembering that his sisters were to arrive at Southampton, probably on that day, he started away by an early train, thinking he should meet them and could go with them to London before returning to Oakhurst. As he was walking through the forest away to the far-off station, Mrs.

Barker was drawing close the curtains and blinds of Janet's room, so that the morning sunshine should not disturb her in her first sleep. He reached Southampton about eight o'clock, and walked to the steamboat pier. "Had the Havre boat arrived?" "Two hours ago, sir." So Forsyth was left with a day of contemplation on his hands. After walking up and down the esplanade about three hundred times, he declared that all watering-places were detestable, and that Southampton was the most detestable of them all. Everything looked to him garish and vulgar; he was jarred and discontented. He began to think he had been a great fool to think so much of what had happened on the previous evening. After all, what had been said? Was it so very wonderful that Janet had preferred that he shouldn't risk his neck for the sake of an old fan? He had been very absurd, and had made a great deal too much of the whole affair; nothing had happened that need interrupt their friendship. Perhaps it was as well that they hadn't been together that day, but after this interval they would resume their walks and

talks together, and they would be friends again as before. After pursuing this train of thought for a time, nothing seemed to Forsyth more ridiculous than to break off a friendship which had brought with it nothing but pleasure, because of some hasty expressions about a fan. He quite laughed to himself at the thought; if he had explained the circumstances to any third person the impression which his account of the matter would probably have left would have been that he and Janet were on the point of quarrelling about the fan, but they now saw the absurdity of interrupting a friendship for so trivial an object. Then Forsyth put his hand in the side-pocket of his coat to feel that the fan was there safe and sound. He had gone to the tower again on the previous night, while Janet was star-gazing, and had possessed himself of the fan. He had not ventured on the risky descent that he had first proposed to Janet. Since she cared for his life, it was well that he should take care of what had become so precious; so he reached the fan humbly and prosaically by putting the loop of the Rector's old Alpine Club rope round one of the battlements of

the tower, and then slipping down it in undignified safety past the fan's resting-place, and so to the ground. Now, when he put his hand into his pocket and found the fan lying in security there, only the fear of the young ladies on the Esplanade with big chignons, loud voices, and high-heeled shoes, prevented him from taking out the sacred relic and kissing it. This action might have been a trifle inconsistent with his argument that nothing had happened that ought to interfere with the course of the friendship that existed between Janet and himself. But then life is made bearable by its inconsistencies. He waited on drearily for an answer to a telegram enquiring whether his sisters had arrived by the morning boat and had gone to London. At last the answer came about three o'clock ; "Yes, they were safely in London—so sorry to have missed him." He crunched the paper into a ball and returned gladly to the railway station. He trod on air ; he was going back to Janet. After waiting a weary hour in the modern temple of Discord, he found his return to Oakhurst actually in process of accomplishment, and in the pleasure of

that delight he almost forgot the miseries of the day.

In the meantime Janet's preparations for leaving Oakhurst had been completed ; all her belongings, except the fan, had been packed up. Her books and papers had disappeared, leaving the ugliness of her little lodging more naked and undisguised than before. The place looked horribly cheerless. " I wish I was gone. I wish it was over," sighed poor Janet ; and obeying a sudden impulse, she took up the solitary book that was left on her table, and kissed it. It was a curious old edition of Froissart, that had been lent her by Forsyth. The next moment she was astonished, almost frightened, at herself ; she seemed to have become quite another creature, whose ways and habits she would have to learn afresh ; the old Janet was gone, and a new Janet had come in her place. What this new Janet might do under imagined circumstances of difficulty and temptation she could not tell ; she could not trust herself as of old. She recognised this change in herself, and saw that " running away " was the least painful solution of her difficulties. " He that

fight and runs away" came into her head, but she didn't finish the stanza. "I'm sure I don't want to fight another day," she said to herself; "one fight has been enough for me!" The Froissart of course had to be returned, and of course it had to be returned with a note. It would have been simply uncivil not to write a note. The writing of it took a long time; it was so difficult to say neither too much nor too little. At last it was sealed and put with the Froissart on the little table in the passage, ready to be taken to the Rectory the next morning when Janet had gone. This is what she wrote:—

"Thursday.

"DEAR MR. FORSYTH,

"I am writing to say 'Good-bye!' I have to go to London to-morrow, and I shall not be in Oakhurst again this summer. I am very sorry not to see you again. It has been a great pleasure to me to be with you and to know you well. I thank you for all that you have done for me. Here is the Froissart; it is the least of the many things I have to be grateful to you for.—Yours sincerely,

"JANET LEIGHTON."

Mrs. Barker looked at the book and the little sealed note with some disgust. "Mary-Anne can take them things up to the Rectory to-morrow after we're gone, 'm," she said to Janet.

"Yes, to-morrow will be soon enough," said Janet.

It was evening now, and Janet felt that her last day at Oakhurst had been a dismal one ; there had been nothing in it that shared in the least in the delights of most Oakhurst days. There had been no walk, no Forsyth. Indoors there had been nothing but what was disagreeable. Mrs. Barker's vigour in packing up, the landlady's sulkiness in losing lodgers that she had expected to keep for another six weeks, the growing discomfort and ugliness of the rooms ; all these combined to make a wretched day independently of the inward unrest which Janet's struggle with herself had produced. Now that the soft evening light was stretching itself over the forest, she thought she would endure the disagreeables of her own four walls no longer ; she resolved to go out and try to recall the tranquil, restful happiness that the forest had so often filled her

with ; or, if that were impossible, she would, for that one evening, indulge herself by dwelling on that deeper and passionate happiness that the last few hours had revealed.

She went out into the forest, but it had lost its charm. It was beautiful and fair, but it did not touch her. The pain of this dreary parting filled her mind. Of what use were the trees and the sunshine when she needed a human arm to lean on, a human heart to love ? She was forlorn, and out of tune with all the rich and tender beauty of the landscape. At last, with a sick aching of the heart, she came to the tower. She passed by it once, saying she would never go up it again, and then with the new, strange fitfulness that had astonished her before, she turned back and mounted the old stairs. Here was the place where her whole life had suddenly changed, where the revelation of her love had come upon her. She sat down and leaned her head against the parapet. She could see nothing now but the high old brick battlements ; they were better to look at than the forest ; they did not call upon her for admiration, for which she was quite unsympathetic.

She sat there thinking of her future ; her blue had turned to grey, her sunshine had faded. The rest of her life must be lived out alone in cold and darkness.





CHAPTER XX.

CHOOSING.

"Is there a choice for strong souls to be weak?
For men erect to crawl like hissing snakes?"



WHILE Janet was walking disconsolately among the forest glades, Forsyth was walking with a light heart and a rapid step towards Oakhurst from the station. He was quite satisfied now that he had absurdly exaggerated the significance of what had passed between him and Janet on the previous day. Nothing had happened that ought to disturb their friendship; it was only a ridiculous egotism that ever made him for a moment imagine the contrary. He was convinced of the truth of this with one side of his mind. The other side of his mind took no notice of his logic, or indeed of anything

else. The one theme that occupied it was, "She loves me ; I love her !"

To get to the Rectory he had almost to pass Janet's door. The reasonable side of his mind said gravely that it supposed he might as well just call in to say he had come back, while the unreasonable side of his mind counted the minutes till he reached her door. His knock was answered by the depressed landlady, who believed Mrs. Leighton was out ; thought she had been out about an hour ; didn't know she was sure when she'd be in. All this Mrs. Barker heard from the little kitchen with approbation. "Tell her I've come back," said Forsyth to the melancholy landlady, "and that I called to see her !"

"Muck !" ejaculated Mrs. Barker to herself in the kitchen. This form of swearing she used but seldom, and kept it for very special occasions. She used it again, however, with additional emphasis when she heard the landlady give Forsyth the Froisart and the note which Janet had left with it. Forsyth broke open the note. "I am writing to say 'Good-bye!' I have to go to London to-

morrow, and I shall not be in Oakhurst again this summer." He read no further. He was not merely pained ; he was shocked and angry. "Why should she treat him like this ? as if it were unsafe to be in his neighbourhood !" he thought.

"Do you know why Mrs. Leighton is going to London so soon ?" he said. The question opened the flood-gates of the woman's distress at losing her lodgers. She had quite thought Mrs. Leighton would stay all through August, and why she should go away in this terrible hurry all of a minute, it was impossible to say. "It's true she took 'em by the week, and she's paid me most regular, I will say that ; but if anyone had 'a said to me that she'd go off in a minute like this, I should 'a said she was too much of a lady to 'a done it. It is enough to make anyone think she's going off her mind ; it is indeed, sir. She set up nearly all last night !"

At this point of the landlady's lament Mrs. Barker's endurance was exhausted. She put her head out of the kitchen door with a face that she would have described herself as being "enough to turn a dairy." "You're wanted, Mrs. Miller, 'm," she

said, snappishly ; and the next moment the kitchen door was shut with a bang, the two women behind it, and Forsyth was left standing alone in the passage. He finished reading the note. The end of it softened him. It was not " what mere friends say ; " it was " a thought stronger." He was touched, too, by what the woman had said of Janet sitting up all night. Still it was a horrible mistake, her going away ; he would talk her out of it, he would convince her that the only thing she could do now to retrieve the mistake would be to unpack her books again and stay till August.

" Did Mrs. Leighton say which way she was going ? " he said, knocking at the kitchen door.

" No, sir."

He asked no more questions, but went out and turned into the path that led to the tower.

When Janet heard footsteps on the stairs leading up to the tower, her heart beat wildly. She sprang to her feet ; a tumult of joy overwhelmed her. She had not cried when she had been sitting there alone, thinking of the dreariness and unloveliness of her future, but now the tears filled her eyes ; the sudden

joy of seeing Forsyth again took away all her courage and her strength. In another moment they were together ; his arm was round her, she was leaning on his breast, his left hand clasped her hand. He had intended that it should all have been so different ; he had meant to be perfectly collected and cool and argumentative, and to have proved to her beyond the shadow of a doubt that there was no reason why she should not stay at Oakhurst, and why they should not always be friends, the same as they had been before. All pretending was over now, however. He kissed her hair and brow.

“ My darling,” he whispered, “ why do you leave me ? ”

She could not answer. “ My sweet, my own ! ” he said, stroking her hair gently with his large hand ; “ tell me you are happy ! ”

“ I am happy,” she answered, in a low, distinct voice.

“ Then don't leave me. What harm is there in being happy ? ”

She disengaged herself gently from his arm, and shook her head.

"We can't be happy in the old way any more," she said.

"What old way, darling?"

"I mean in being together, and not knowing that we loved each other!"

"Is that the old way? Then the new way is better."

"It would be better. But it is impossible."

"You're wrong there, dear; and I think I know why. You have had so little happiness in your life, that when it comes it frightens you. It is something strange and new and unaccustomed; you think something bad must come of it, and that you must get rid of it as quickly as possible. I know more about happiness than you do; I have had more experience of it. I am not frightened by it. I welcome it as it deserves; I will keep it as long as I can. Dear, don't leave me. Let us always be friends!"

"Friends?" Janet repeated in a dreamy, far-away voice.

"Yes, darling; we have to bear a great misfortune together. Our lives are separated in one way.

Our love can never be completed in the best and fullest way; that happiness is denied to us. But don't make our misfortune wilfully greater than it need be. You can't be my wife, but we can be friends, we can be loving friends. Don't leave me. Let us have at least this one more month together."

Janet's breath came quickly. "I said I was happy just now," she said; "so I was, so I am. But I am selfish, horribly selfish, to be happy. This love of yours that you give me and that makes me happy is the one bright and beautiful thing that I have had in my life. It makes me with my spoiled, wretched life, less wretched. But it is different with you. There was no reason why you should be wretched at all. Your whole life was before you to do what you liked with. If you had not loved me you would have loved some one else, and your love would not have been the broken, incomplete thing that our love must always be. I have dragged you in and made you suffer for my mistakes and misery. It is a great misfortune for you that you love me!"

"No, darling."

"Don't you say yourself that our lives are separated; we can never think of marriage? That is spoiling your life in a way in which it needn't have been spoiled if you had loved some one else."

"But, dear, I don't love anyone else; so it's no good talking about that. I love you; that is settled, nothing can change it. You say my love makes you happy, but that it is a great misfortune for me to love you. It is a misfortune if you insist on leaving me. You can decide whether it shall be a misfortune or the reverse."

"I don't understand. Try and tell me plainly just what it is you wish."

"I wish to be friends again in the old way. I wish you not to avoid me, and run away from me, but to see me as much and as often as you can. A friend would not leave me as you were leaving me. Let me only have the delight of being with you."

A silence followed, and after a while Forsyth seeing from her face that it wasn't the silence of assent, added: "It isn't much I ask for; only that you should trust me to be with you. You might

trust me. I have loved you a long time ; I love you so deeply that I would never make you sorry you had trusted me."

"It is very hard, very difficult," said Janet, replying not so much to him as to her own thoughts.

He took her hand. "We have been good friends, Janet, haven't we ? At Norborough, when you were a little girl almost, we were friends ; and here, too, we have been friends ; and now that we know we love each other we shall be better friends. That is all, isn't it ? "

She put her other hand upon his caressingly ; still she did not speak, and he saw he had not convinced her.

"Janet, speak !" he cried, in a sharp tone of pain.

"It is so difficult to say what I want to say," she repeated. "Be patient while I try to make you understand. While we were mere friends we could be together every day with light hearts, satisfied with the pleasure of being together. But now that is over ; it can never come back again. We are not friends any more ; we are lovers. We

can't be together in the old light-hearted way any more; we should always have to be remembering that our love is not like the love of other lovers. Our lives must be lived apart; my marriage is a perpetual barrier between us. And then our being together would not give us happiness as it used to do when we were mere friends; it would make us ill at ease, unhappy, and suspicious. But stop," she added, seeing that Forsyth was going to interrupt her; "there is another thing that I care more for still. If we were together often, just as if we were merely friends, it would be a pretence, a thing that would make us false to each other and force us to tell lies to other people—quite useless lies, because love like ours cannot be hidden. Everybody would know it and gossip about it."

"You are not like yourself now," he said, gloomily. "I thought you were not a slave to what people say."

She trembled, but went on bravely: "I care very much for what some people say."

"Janet, you pain me exquisitely by this 'people say.' Is this your argument against our love?"

From other women one might expect it,—but from you !”

“ If you are angry, I shan’t be able to go on,” she said, “ and I want to go on because I haven’t come yet to my strongest reason of all why we should decide that it is best not to be together any more. It comes out of this ‘ people say ’ argument that makes you so angry. Isn’t there something more that we both wish to do with our lives except just living ? You give part of your life to get a living ; the other part you want to have to use to do things that you care most about. You have worked a good deal at Cambridge to get the people there to consent to have some old things that are useless given up ; and to get new things carried out, new methods of teaching adopted, new subjects taught ; to make the influence of the university more widely felt over the country, so that it may become the great helper of higher education everywhere. You have talked to me about all this, and I have seen that working for these things is the part of your life that you care for most—it is the part of yourself that is most worth having.”

"Yes," he said, "but what has this to do with our seeing each other?"

"I don't know Cambridge," she said, "but I suppose people there talk about each other, and are influenced not simply by arguments, but by the character and reputation of the man who uses them. Would your work for these reforms be worth as much as it was before if it were said of you—— what you know would be said if we are often together, as you propose?"

"You are wrong, dearest. What could be said that would hurt us or the things we work for?"

"Don't let there be any pretending between you and me. You must know what would be said; and you must know that the saying of it, and the believing of it would be a blow at every object for which you have hitherto worked. That is true of you, but it is a thousand times more true of me. Men are forgiven for faults of that kind, but women never are. There are causes that I work for, that I care about, in my narrow life, that may be put parallel with the objects you work for in your wider life. I cannot do what you wish without throwing

all my weight into the scale that is opposed to everything that I wish to work for. For the sake of indulging a love which I know is innocent, which I say before God I know always will be innocent, I should be a traitor to every good thing that up to now it has been my chief pleasure to work for. There are other things to be lived for besides love." She spoke with enthusiasm which doubled the weight of her words, and he answered—

"Janet, you are convincing me that I was wrong, and that you are right; but you are wringing my heart."

"The best thing of all in the world," Janet continued softly, "is when you can live for love and for all the other great objects of men and women's lives at the same time. But we can't have this best thing; we have to choose. And if we choose to live for love we should always be haunted by the memory that we had been treacherous to everything that we owe faithfulness to, and then love itself would lose its sweetness, and we should find ourselves without the happiness that we had given such a huge price for."

"Janet, your words cut me ; I see we must part. But I can't be glad about it, and see that it is right and best, like you can."

The tears sprang into her eyes. Glad ! But he couldn't really believe her to be glad, and so she made no protest in contradiction to his words.

"I will tell you how I came to feel about it as I do," she said. "Last night, after I knew that we loved each other, I was intensely happy. I did not think at all about the future or the past. I was satisfied with the present delight of being loved. I sat looking out at the moonlight, not noticing how the time went, till it was nearly morning."

Forsyth took her hand and kissed it, and she went on—

"Then my dear old servant, who has taken care of me ever since I was a baby, came in to me. She had guessed, I don't know how, something of what has happened. And from what she said I learned that I had been dreaming of a fool's paradise ; that we must part at once and absolutely. She gave me a glimpse of the kind of reproach and shame I should bring on myself and on every object

that I have ever cared to work for, unless we are resolute enough to give up being together. Then I determined to leave Oakhurst at once; and I have been very sad all day because I thought I shouldn't see you again. I shall not be so sad now; I have seen you again, and I have told you the whole truth."

Almost unconsciously Janet had now urged the strongest possible plea to convince Forsyth of the necessity of the parting between them being immediate and final. "Shame on her!" that was an impossible, inconceivable misery. Even parting would be better than that.

"You spoke just now," he said, gloomily, "of our choice being between two kinds of happiness—the happiness of being together, and the happiness of fidelity to the other purposes of our lives. I can see no choice but between miseries—the misery of parting, and the other misery you speak of, reproach and shame."

"But if you see we cannot avoid one or other of these pains, help me to make the best choice."

Then, after a moment's silence, Janet spoke again

in a stronger voice, more like the voice of her old self—

“ But isn't it folly for me to talk of choosing ? We have no choice. You and I could not choose to be dastardly traitors to everything that is good. We are compelled to part ; we have no choice.”

“ You mean we have no choice but to be miserable ? ”

“ Not so. Is it nothing that we love each other, and that we shall always have the remembrance of this love, bright and pure and incapable of blemish ? ”

“ I cannot be contented by a mere memory. You expect me to be thankful for small mercies.”

“ Well, perhaps it is as you say. You have had more happiness in your life than I have ; but for me this glimpse of happiness has been a revelation that will brighten all the rest of my life. Always after this the grey of my life will be shot with gold. You have no thankfulness to give unless you have all gold and no grey.”

“ My darling, I am thankful for your love ; only it is so hard to part ; to think that you must be all

alone, and that I must be all alone, when we might make a heaven by being together. There is only one way of bearing it."

He did not say what that one way was, and she did not ask him. But she knew what he meant, before he said, abruptly—

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-five."

"He is thirty-two; but his life must kill him in time. I cannot part from you finally, but I can wait."

Janet shuddered slightly. "Don't dwell on that kind of hope," she said.

"Why not?"

"The same thought has often come across me—not lately—before I knew you again, I mean. But it is terrible; you cannot rest with such a hope. It is like a ghost perpetually haunting one. I have been haunted by it, so I know what I am saying. Almost anything is better than the perpetual unrest of such a thought."

"But is it possible to avoid it?"

"I don't know. Most things are possible. Let us be going," she said, moving towards the steps.

"Janet, no—one moment more. This is the place where we first knew we loved each other. Come to the very place once again." His arm was round her; his face was very near hers. She felt that his love was her very life's breath. For one long minute they stood together in silence. Then he said in a low voice: "Dear, I suppose you are right; we must part; but you must give me a promise. If you should ever be in trouble or difficulty, if ever you are in need of the sort of help a man can give a woman, promise me that I shall give you that help. Suppose you should be ill and not able to work, promise me that I shall know, and that you will not be too proud to let me work for you. Suppose his lawyers should worry you, and you want a friend to advise with what you should do, promise to let me be that friend. I don't talk about being your brother, because that is nonsense. I would give half my life if you could be my wife the other half. But give me this promise; show me that you trust me enough to promise what I have asked."

"I promise."

"You have never once in all your life called me by my name. Say 'Alec, I promise.'"

"Alec, I promise."

"And kiss me."

She kissed him gravely.

"See here, my own love," he said, taking her fan from his pocket. "I have saved this after all; a very safe way I took to reach it, and here it is. It is mine now, isn't it? I shall keep it as the sign of your promise."

Then they came down the old stairs together, and walked slowly to Oakhurst. They were as silent almost as they had been yesterday evening, but what a world of experience they had gone through since then. At the wicket-gate they did not separate, Forsyth came with Janet to her own door.

"Remember your promise," he said when they were inside the little garden. "I will not try to see you unless you send for me, but you have promised to send for me if I can serve you."

"Yes."

"You have not made me promise you anything."

"No I daren't. If long years of absence should

cool your love for me, and if in time you love some other woman, it would be the best thing possible for you. I will not bind you to myself by any promise."

"I am bound, then, without the promise."

Now they were inside the house. Forsyth's 'Froissart' was still on the table in the passage. He put his hand on it. "I have something of yours in remembrance of this evening; keep this book of mine. It will remind you of me sometimes."

"Yes, I will keep it; but I shall not need reminding. When you think of me, do not think of me as forlorn and miserable. I shall be happy. Your love will make me happy. I shall always remember my promise, and feel that I shall never be in need of a friend. Let me think that you will be happy too."

"Don't talk of happiness; this separation is too bitter."

He took her once more in his arms and kissed her, knowing that this kiss was the last. One minute later Janet was alone; he had gone away; the parting was over. She groped her way, it was nearly dark, into her bedroom, and sat down, thinking over

everything that had happened. She had told Forsyth the truth when she said she was happy. His love for her was like a rich inheritance of which she had just become the owner. What matter though it were a thousand leagues distant, still it was hers. "I shall never feel lonely or desolate," she thought, "for I shall keep my promise and send to him if I am in need of help. He will be happy, too. He must be happy in a little time."

Here Mrs. Barker came in with a candle; she had heard Forsyth's voice in the house and had been anxious. When she came in and saw Janet's face serene and happy, she was puzzled. The old woman looked grave and distressed when she saw that the book Janet was clasping was Forsyth's 'Froissart.' Janet saw the look and interpreted it.

"Mrs. Barker," she said, "I met Mr. Forsyth out this evening. We talked together a long while about my going away. He knows it is best for me to go away. I shall not see him again for a long, long time—perhaps never; so he has given me this book as a keepsake."

Mrs. Barker grunted in a disapproving way.

"You mustn't think badly of him or of me either. There is no cause."

There was no reply, so Janet added—

"You believe what I say?"

"Yes'm," said Mrs. Barker, slowly, "I du believe what you say; but for all that I wish he'd bin at the bottom of the sea before ever he come to Oakhurst."

This qualified acceptance of her assurance was all Janet could get. Poor Mrs. Barker remained for some months profoundly morose and suspicious. At last, when she had satisfied herself that Janet had no communication whatever with Forsyth, she gradually thawed into her usual cordiality of manner to her mistress. Perhaps it was good discipline for Janet to have to endure the vials of Mrs. Barker's wrath during the first months of her separation from Forsyth.





CHAPTER XXI.

THE END.



ANET and Forsyth were faithful to their resolution not to see each other. The discipline and self-conquest of continued separation were often painful, for their love for each other remained as strong as on the day they parted. To the disappointment perhaps of both, Janet never had any occasion to act on her promise to send to Forsyth for help in case of any trouble or anxiety. Still the promise was a great source of consolation to each. On rare occasions they wrote to each other. These letters were generally written some time during the long, bright summer days of July, until they came to be regarded by the two friends as a sort of anniversary festival commemorating their summer together at Oakhurst.

Sometimes during the years of separation they did see each other. But it was always accidentally. Once, at a concert, they were sitting within a few yards of one another ; once they met at an evening party in the house of a common friend. "Mrs. Leighton, may I introduce Mr. Forsyth? Oh! you know each other already; how *very* odd!" And then they were left by the hostess for one half-hour's bliss in the solitude of an over-crowded London drawing-room.

Sometimes their sight of each other was less satisfactory—as, for instance, when Janet was whirled past Forsyth in a hansom cab. Still the days when they had even a passing glimpse of each other were remembered in their calendar as red-letter days.

Her love never became a source of weakness to Janet; on the contrary, it enriched her whole nature by widening her sympathies and giving her an insight into the emotional side of men and women's characters of which she had before been unconscious. Even though the love between Forsyth and herself was necessarily thwarted and incomplete, yet the wisdom it had taught her made

her happier and better, stronger and more tender, than in the days when she only knew love from what other people had said and written about it. Love was her schoolmaster, and under his tutelage, and partly because of the severity of his discipline, she learnt much of which she must otherwise have remained ignorant.

But Janet and Forsyth were not destined to end their days apart. Charlie Leighton died. There is no saying how long he would have lived if Lady Ann had lived, but she died about four years after Janet and Forsyth had parted at Oakhurst. As long as she lived she devoted herself to the task of keeping her nephew sober; she never tired; she never relaxed her watchfulness over him. Before she died she tried to form a kind of committee composed of her sister-in-law, Marston, and two doctors, who, she hoped, would take her place and do her work when she was dead. She died, however, knowing well that they would fail. She thought bitterly of Janet. "If she were here she could take my work," she thought; "none of these others are capable of it." She was quite right. In order, as

she thought, to attach Marston more closely to his master, she left him a legacy of 200*l*. This fortune, however, was just sufficient to enable him to give up his situation and take a public-house, thus realising the dreams of a butler's ambition. So Leighton was deprived of the surveillance of the two people of whom he was most in dread. His mother was utterly powerless to control him; he indulged in the wildest excesses, which in a few months put an end to his wretched career. The papers announced the death of Charles Reginald Grenville Leighton Leighton, of Leighton Court, in the county of Barset. The deceased gentleman, it was added, had long suffered from delicate health, which precluded him from taking that part in public life to which his position as the representative of one of the oldest and wealthiest of Barsetshire families would justly have entitled him.

About twelve months later Janet and Forsyth were married at Oakhurst. They retained their affection for the tower, and when they stayed at Oakhurst Rectory they often began and ended their walks by a visit to it. Mr. Williams not infre-

quently quoted their "craze about the tower" as an example of the follies to which clever people are liable. "It has no architectural merits whatever," he used to say in an aggrieved tone. Mrs. Williams knew the history of the affection Janet and Forsyth had for the tower, but she used to reply to her husband with a grave face, but with a merry twinkle in her eye, "No architectural merits! why it is one of the most interesting examples in Hampshire of the later Georgian style."

It should be added that Mrs. Barker always disapproved of Forsyth. After Janet was married she tolerated him, as she would have done any other inevitable misfortune, but she never gave way to the inconsistency of liking a person who had at one time caused her so much anxiety.



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